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THE ZHEJIANG FORMULA

Common prosperity in motion: How a province is closing the gaps

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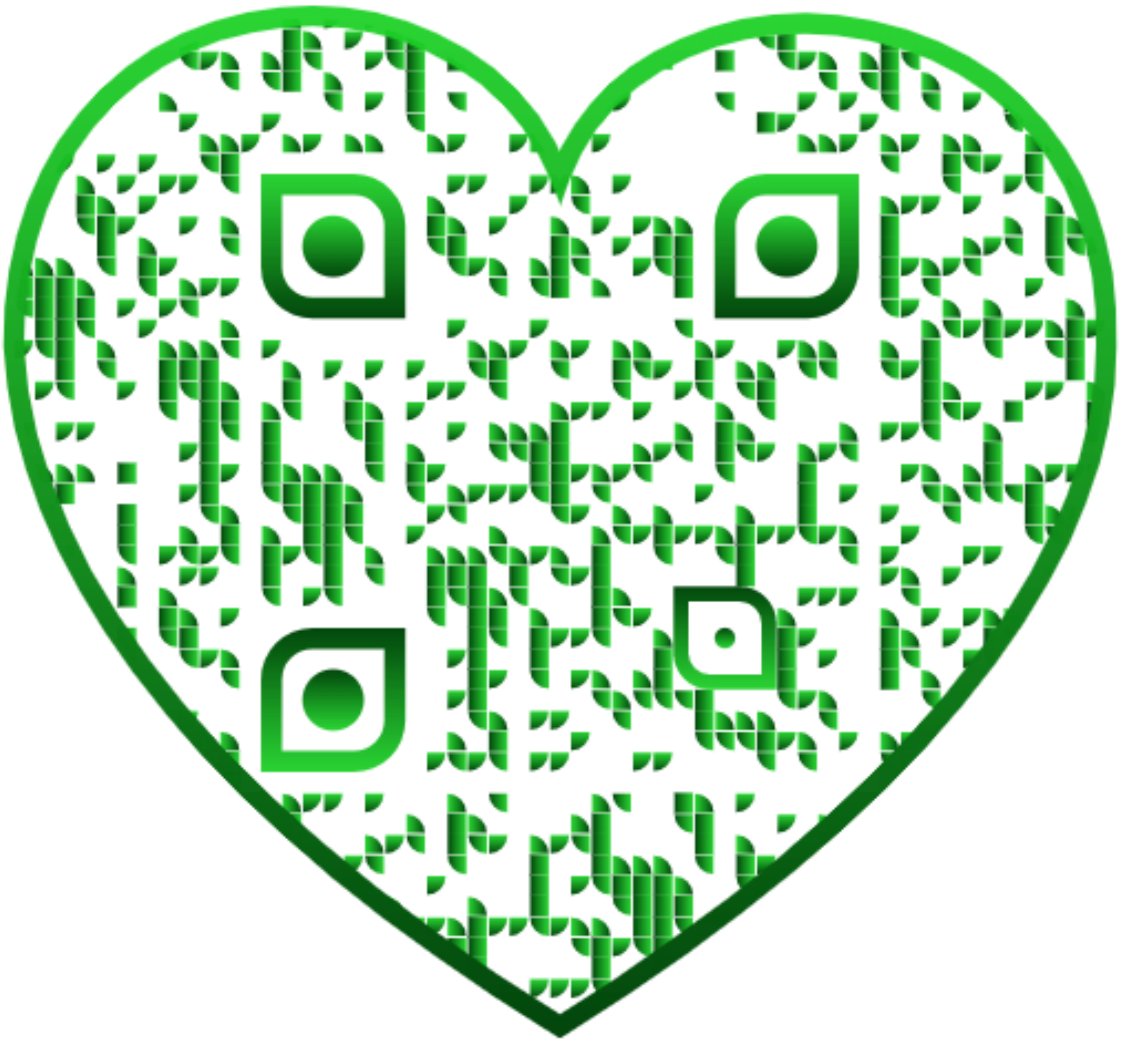

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Cover Photo: The Aficion Chocolate Village, a resort featuring all things chocolate, in Jiashan County, Jiaxing City in Zhejiang Province, on August 7 (XINHUA)

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A Pilot Playbook

On May 20, 2021, the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's highest state administrative organ, issued a guideline designating the eastern province of Zhejiang as a national demonstration zone for achieving common prosperity. The directive tasked the province with spearheading institutional reform and innovation to narrow urban-rural and regional development gaps as well as income disparities, aiming for substantial progress by 2025 and the realization of common prosperity by 2035.

As the final year of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, 2025 is a milestone for Zhejiang. Through systematic reforms and project-driven initiatives, the province focuses on attaining phased objectives and generating transferable practices.

The Zhejiang demonstration zone has advanced the practical implementation of common prosperity, transforming it from a theoretical concept into a workable institutional model. It validates how an effective market and capable government can balance efficiency with fairness under a market economy. By narrowing development gaps and optimizing income distribution through institutional mechanisms, the zone ensures that growth benefits all equitably, thereby strengthening public fulfillment, wellbeing and security.

Zhejiang has achieved considerable progress. Key indicators show reduced inequality: In the first three quarters of 2025, the per-capita disposable income of rural residents in the province reached 36,383 yuan ($5,152), a year-on-year increase of 5.6 percent; the urban-rural per-capita disposable income ratio stood at 1.73, meaning urban residents' disposable income was 1.73 times that of rural residents.

In June 2003, Zhejiang launched the Green Rural Revival Program, with the aim of renovating and beautifying 10,000 administrative villages and developing 1,000 of them into models of moderate prosperity. Awarded the United Nations Champions of the Earth Award in 2018 for transforming polluted areas into green spaces, the program underpins these broader common prosperity efforts. Access to basic public services has improved, and an olive-shaped social structure—with most of the population in a broad middle bracket—is now taking shape, fostering a widely shared prosperity.

The province has comprehensively integrated the development philosophy of common prosperity into the entire process of modernizing provincial governance. These efforts and accomplishments are not only reflected in economic and social data and indicators, but, more importantly, in the establishment of a sustainable and effective mechanism for common prosperity, providing a replicable and learnable model for the whole country. **BR**

WRITE TO US

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CANADA.....CAD2.60 SWITZERLAND.....CHF2.60
JAPAN.....JPY188 EUROPE.....EUR1.90
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BEYOND THE DRILL

A flare in a national-level demonstration zone of continental shale oil at the Daqing Oilfield in Daqing, Heilongjiang Province, on December 4. Daqing Oilfield, one of China's largest energy production bases, announced on December 5 that its Gulong shale oil block, established in 2021, has exceeded 1 million tons in annual output this year. This milestone signifies the block's successful transition to scaled production.

Shale oil, liquid hydrocarbons trapped within shale rock formations and extractable for refining, is a widely distributed energy resource, with reserves surpassing those of conventional oil sources.

XINHUA

Hello, Mr. Snowman!

An iconic snow sculpture at the Sun Island scenic spot in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, on December 9. The sculpture, 23.8 meters tall and made with 5,000 cubic meters of snow, was officially unveiled at the scenic spot that same day.

Organ Donation

The Report on the Development of Organ Donation and Transplantation in China (2024) was released on December 8 at the eighth China-International Organ Donation Conference and the Belt and Road Symposium on Organ Donation and Transplantation International Cooperation Development held in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province.

The report revealed that in 2024, China saw 364,000 new voluntary registrations for posthumous organ donation. In terms of voluntary registration, 77 percent of new registrants last year were aged between 18 and 35.

According to the report, the country had recorded 11,249 instances of organ donation in 2024. This figure consisted of 6,744 posthumous donations and 4,505 living donations from relatives. Over 24,000 organ transplant surgeries were performed in China last year.

The conference was held from December 6 to 8. It was organized by the China Organ Transplantation Development Foundation and the China Organ Donation Administrative Center.

MH370 Compensation Cases

A Beijing court has ruled on compensation claims filed by families of some of the passengers missing on Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, according to a statement from the Beijing High People's Court on December 8.

The eight cases involve eight passengers. The Chaoyang District People's Court on December 5 ordered the defendants to compensate the plaintiffs in line with the Montreal Convention and related Chinese laws.

The compensation covers damages, funeral expenses, emotional distress damages, other losses and related costs, totaling over 2.9 million yuan ($410,000) per case.

Flight MH370 went missing on March 8, 2014. Since 2016, family members of 75 missing passengers have successively filed 78 lawsuits, seeking damages and calling for the establishment of a search and rescue fund, among other demands, against Malaysia Airlines and other defendants.

Medical Insurance Catalog

China unveiled an updated version of its national medical insurance drug list and the inaugural edition of the commercial insurance innovative drug list on December 7, according to the National Healthcare Security Administration.

The updated list has added 114 drugs, among which 50 are innovative pharmaceuticals. It has incorporated certain medications that fill the gaps in basic medical insurance coverage, including drugs for major, rare and chronic diseases.

The commercial insurance innovative drug list included 19 drugs for the treatment of tumors, rare diseases and Alzheimer's, among others.

The country's medical insurance authority has adjusted the list for eight years in a row, increasing the total number of medications to 3,253 and improving coverage in key areas such as oncology, chronic diseases, mental illnesses, rare diseases and pediatric medications.

Great Bay University

The inauguration ceremony of the Great Bay University (GBU) was held on December 6.

Located in Dongguan City of Guangdong, the university has two campuses that cover about 133.3 hectares. It initially sets up five regular undergraduate programs, namely mathematics and applied mathematics, physics, materials science and engineering, computer science and technology, and industrial engineering.

A public institution of higher education, sponsored by the Guangdong Provincial Government and supported by the municipal government of Dongguan, it received approval from the Ministry of Education in June. The 80 freshmen started their first semester in August.

Tian Gang, the founding

president of the GBU and academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said at the inauguration ceremony that the university will "provide high-quality talent for the accelerated development of new productive forces in Dongguan as well as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and facilitate scientific and technological innovation and the development of emerging industries there."

He noted that the GBU will collaborate with multiple universities, research institutions and leading enterprises to jointly nurture postgraduate students.

The Greater Bay Area is a city cluster encompassing nine cities in Guangdong plus Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions. It is one of the most economically dynamic regions in China.

New High-Speed Rail

China launched a new section of high-speed passenger railway to a southern city on its border with Viet Nam on December 5, a move set to boost cross-border tourism and strengthen regional connectivity.

The newly opened 81-km segment between Chongzuo and Pingxiang of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is the final stretch of the Nanning-Pingxiang high-speed railway, designed for speeds of up to 250 km per hour. The preceding Nanning-Chongzuo section began operation in December 2022.

The opening of the new railway section makes the entire route fully operational, allowing for more efficient passenger travel from Nanning, capital of Guangxi, to Pingxiang, a key border city. Total travel time could now be cut to 75 minutes—from the previous more than four hours.

Weather Modification

China's meteorological authorities have actively carried out artificial rain and snow enhancement operations during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, cumulatively increasing precipitation by 167.7 billion tons, according to official data.

During the period, meteorological authorities have also carried out artificial hail prevention operations, which helped to reduce economic losses by about 60.3 billion yuan ($8.5 billion), according to the China Meteorological Administration.

China's weather modification operations have provided strong support for disaster prevention and mitigation as well as agricultural harvests, said Cai Miao, an official from the administration.

Weather modification operations have also boosted ecological improvements as meteorological departments conduct year-round artificial rain and snow enhancement in key areas such as Sanjiangyuan, or the Three-River Source area, which is home to the headwaters of the Yangtze, Yellow and Lancang rivers, contributing to a gradual increase in vegetation coverage in the region.

During the upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, authorities will work to enhance the effectiveness of weather modification operations in a bid to better serve disaster mitigation, agricultural production, ecological protection and restoration, and major emergency responses, according to Ren Zhenhe, another official from the administration.

XINHUA

Ready to (car)Go

An aircraft of China Postal Airlines waits to conduct the inaugural flight of the Chongqing-Yangon cargo route at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport in Chongqing Municipality on December 9. As the 35th international route operated by China Postal Airlines, the route is expected to inject new momentum into economic and trade cooperation between China and Myanmar.

XINHUA

Hitting the Slopes

People ski at Qiangrengu Ski Resort in Wenchuan County, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, on December 8. Sichuan has launched four major tourism routes and more than 5,000 winter cultural and tourism activities to enrich visitors' winter travel experience.

Invention Patents

China has become the first country to amass over 5 million valid domestic invention patents, and its international patent applications submitted via the Patent Cooperation Treaty have led globally for six consecutive years, the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA), the country's top IP regulator, said on December 9.

As of late June, the number of high-value invention patents per 10,000 people in China had reached 15.3, surpassing the goal of 12 set out in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) ahead of schedule, according to the CNIPA.

The technology transfer rate among universities and research institutions has risen steadily. Notably, the industrialization rate of enterprise invention patents increased from 44.9 percent in 2020 to 53.3 percent in 2024.

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China's IP landscape has undergone a strategic shift from emphasizing quantity accumulation to pursuing quality enhancement, the CNIPA said.

This transition has accelerated the commercialization of high-value patents, illustrating the country's innovation-driven development and laying a solid foundation to achieve greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology over the upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period.

Output Milestone

Tesla's Gigafactory in Shanghai rolled out its 4 millionth vehicle on December 8, according to the company, marking a new milestone as the U.S. carmaker deepens its development in step with China's rapidly growing new energy sector.

The company's Shanghai plant, its first Gigafactory outside the United States, began construction in January 2019 and produced its first vehicle in December of that year.

Now turning out a new car roughly every 30 seconds, the plant accounts for nearly half of Tesla's global electric vehicle deliveries.

It took more than 30 months for the plant to produce its first 1 million vehicles, while output rose from 3 million to 4 million in about 14 months, according to the company.

It serves both the Chinese mainland market and overseas customers, with vehicles exported to Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. In October, the Shanghai plant shipped more than 35,000 vehicles abroad, the highest monthly export volume in two years, according to the company.

In February, Tesla's new Megafactory in Shanghai, dedicated to manufacturing energy-storage batteries, launched production, which is its second major facility in Shanghai and the first of its kind outside the U.S.

Passenger Car Sales

China's new-energy passenger vehicle market continued to see stable growth in November, with retail sales reaching nearly 1.32 million units, industry association data showed on December 8.

The figure marked a 4.2-percent year-on-year increase, according to the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA).

In November, production of new-energy passenger vehicles reached around 1.76 million units, an increase of 18.3 percent year on year.

The penetration rate of new-energy vehicles, a gauge of popularity, in the domestic market climbed to 59.3 percent last month, up 7 percentage points year on year, according to the data.

During the first 11 months of the year, total retail sales of new-energy passenger cars amounted to 11.47 million units, representing a 19.6-percent increase from the previous year, the CPCA data showed.

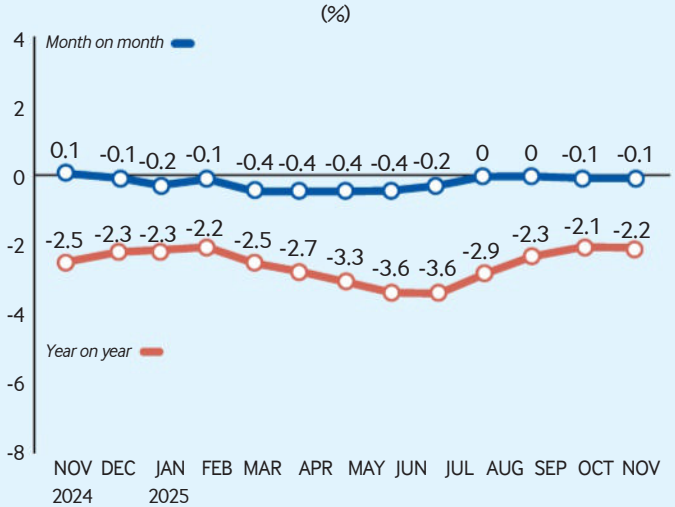
On the export front, China shipped about 284,000 new-energy passenger vehicles in November, surging 243.3 percent year on year.

From January to November, total exports of new-energy passenger vehicles reached about 2.15 million units, up 82.6 percent year on year, the association said.

NUMBERS

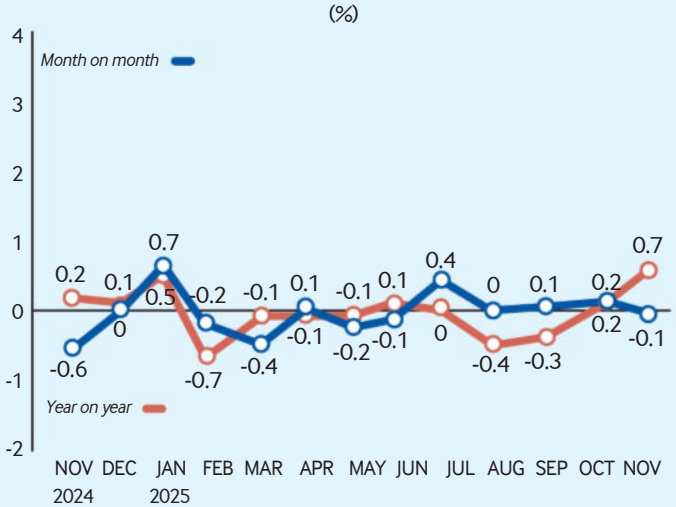
China's Producer Price Index (PPI) Growth

(%)



China's Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth

(%)



Foreign Direct Investment

A recent report by *fDi Intelligence*, an investment research publication under the *Financial Times* newspaper, identifies China as the country most frequently named by global experts as the fastest growing source of foreign direct investment (FDI) by 2026.

The report, released on December 4, also noted that the center of gravity in global trade and investment is shifting rapidly southward, with emerging economies poised to become the primary drivers of global growth.

According to the report, *fDi Intelligence* surveyed 101 senior FDI professionals worldwide in October. When asked to name three economies expected to expand their share as sources of global FDI in 2026, China received the most mentions—74 in total.

The landscape has now changed pointedly, with companies including ByteDance, Geely Holding, BYD, JD.com and Haier joining Huawei, Alibaba and Tencent among the most active Chinese investors worldwide. The companies are pursuing assertive internationalization strategies to reach new markets with cutting-edge products, said the report.

Beyond China, fast-growing economies such as the United Arab Emirates, India and Saudi Arabia also feature prominently in the survey, with 40, 31 and 29 mentions respectively.

Foreign Currency Reserves

China's foreign currency reserves totaled $3.3464 trillion by the end of November, up by $3 billion or 0.09 percent, compared to late October, official data showed on December 7.

The State Administration of Foreign Exchange attributed this increase to the combined impact of currency translation and changes in asset prices.

Influenced by factors such as macroeconomic data and monetary policy expectations of major economies, the U.S. dollar index, a measure of the value of the currency relative to a basket of other currencies, declined in November, while global financial asset prices experienced mixed movements, the administration noted.

Supported by a steady economy, China remains well-positioned to maintain the overall stability of its foreign currency reserves, the administration said.

Lowering Insurance Risks

The National Financial Regulatory Administration issued a notice lowering risk factors for multiple businesses of insurance companies on December 5, a move aimed at encouraging long-term investments to support the capital market.

The adjustments include reductions in risk factors for specific stock holdings and insurance businesses.

According to industry analysts, the reduction of risk factors for insurance companies' equity investments is expected to encourage greater market participation by insurers, supporting a stable and active capital market.

Logistics Sector Expansion

China's logistics sector revealed a continued expansion in business activities in November, according to the latest data released by the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

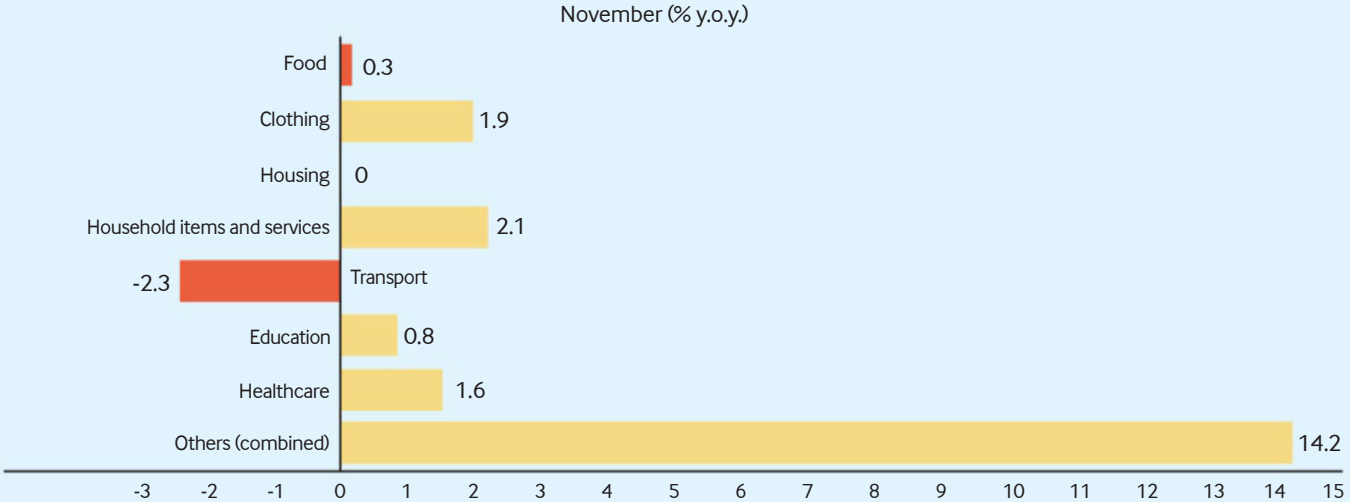
The index tracking the country's logistics market—an indicator of economic vitality—stood at 50.9 percent in November, up 0.2 percentage point from the previous month.

The business volume index was 51 percent in the country's central regions, and 51.2 percent in its western regions, with both figures coming in above the national level. The business volume index in China's eastern regions hit 50.5 percent, up 0.1 percentage point month on month.

Demand in the transportation equipment, home appliances and furniture, smart devices, and automotive and auto parts manufacturing sectors continued to rally, said Hu Han, an official from the China Logistics Information Center.

China's CPI Growth by Type

November (% y.o.y.)



(Source: *National Bureau of Statistics*)

UNITED KINGDOM

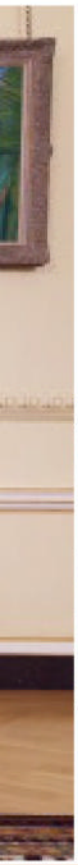
Prime Minister Keir Starmer (second, left), Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (second, right), French President Emmanuel Macron (first, right) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz meet in London on December 8

CAMBODIA

Villagers flee their homes near the Cambodia-Thailand border, seeking safe shelter in Siem Reap Province on December 9. A border conflict that erupted early on December 8 has since forced tens of thousands of residents to evacuate

JAPAN

Earthquake information is displayed on a screen in Tokyo on December 9. A day earlier, an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck northern and northeastern parts of the country, injuring at least 52 people



NORWAY

Police vehicles outside Storo Storsenter in Oslo on December 8. A 19-year-old man was arrested after firing a shot inside a shopping center in Oslo that day, with no injuries reported

ITALY

Tennis player Jasmine Paolini (left) and Giovanni Malago, President of the Milan-Cortina organizing committee, walk down the gangway with a lantern holding the flame of the 2026 Milan-Cortina Olympic Winter Games at Fiumicino Airport in Rome on December 4, signaling the start of a series of torch relay events

COTE D'IVOIRE

Incumbent President Alassane Ouattara (left) is sworn in for a fourth five-year term in Abidjan on December 8, after winning the election with 89.77 percent of the votes

TOKYO OLYMPICS DIVING CHAMPION RETIRES

Zhang Jiaqi, the Chinese diving sensation and Tokyo 2020 gold medalist, has announced her retirement at age 21.

Zhang claimed a national title at 12, swept the National Games at 13, and at 17, soared to Olympic glory in the women's synchronized 10-meter platform alongside Chen Yuxi. Following the Tokyo Games, physical development and weight changes altered her performance. Despite rigorous efforts, including a diet, recapturing her top form proved elusive.

With rising young talents intensifying competition, she faced the disappointment of missing the 2024 Paris Olympic squad and a 10th-place finish in the National Games individual event in November.

"As veterans step down, new talents always rise to carry the dream forward," she said in a social media video.

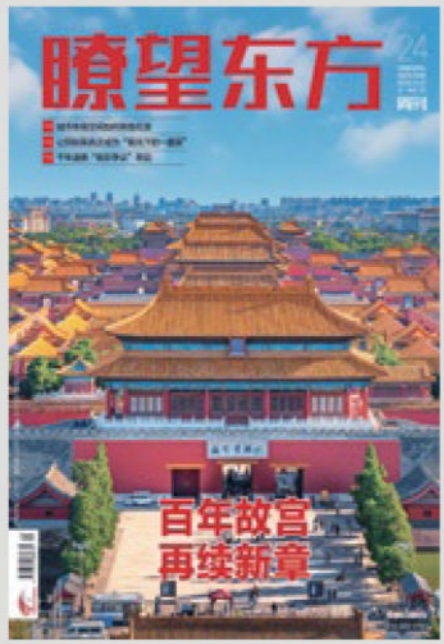
Bazaar Boom

Gmw.cn
December 8

Caowa, a rural market fair located in a small county in Shandong Province, has recently become an unlikely sensation. On peak days, it draws more than 100,000 visitors—many arriving from neighboring provinces—and can generate as much as 6 million yuan ($850,000) in sales. Online, its popularity has been amplified further, with hundreds of millions tuning in to livestreamed tours that wind through its crowded, clamorous lanes.

Caowa's rise to fame points to a broader shift. Across China, young people are discovering their passion for traditional morning markets, temple fairs and county bazaars—spaces long regarded as outdated or unfashionable. Price is an obvious allure: Steaming buns sell for as little as 0.5 yuan ($0.07) apiece, while flowers and clothing go for a fraction of urban prices.

Yet the attraction is not merely economic. The bustle of the stalls, the aromas of freshly cooked food, the clatter of folk performances and the warm, easy exchanges between vendors and buyers create a sensory and social experience that neither shopping in urban malls nor online e-commerce can provide.



A Century of Stewardship

Oriental Outlook
November 27

A century ago, in 1925, the Forbidden City—the imperial palace complex at the heart of Beijing—opened its gates to the public. Since then, it has evolved from an imperial enclosure into the Palace Museum, one of the world's busiest cultural institutions, welcoming more than 10 million visitors a year.

"It took Changan 30 years to produce its first 10 million vehicles, another seven years to reach 20 million, and just over four years to reach the 30-million milestone."

Zhu Huarong, Chairman of China Changan Automobile Group Co. Ltd., as the company's 30 millionth vehicle rolled off the production line on December 10

"In the future, technologies like brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), exoskeletons and robotic hands can expand mobility for these disadvantaged individuals, thus broadening their social horizons and unlocking new possibilities for consumption."

Han Bicheng, founder of Hangzhou-based brain tech firm BrainCo, during a roundtable discussion on the intersection of BCIs and disability

On September 30, a special exhibition titled A Century of Stewardship: From the Forbidden City to the Palace Museum, opened within the museum, introducing visitors to 200 carefully chosen exhibits. The exhibition offers a view not only of the cultural lineage preserved within the palace walls across centuries of Chinese history, but also of the people who have dedicated themselves to protecting and restoring the treasures it holds.

A striking example of modern restoration work is the Palace of Tranquil Longevity, a garden commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor as his personal retreat. Restoration of the site began in 2000 and involves a wide range of traditional crafts—many of which had already been lost. Part of the garden opened to the public on September 30, offering visitors a clear sense of how far the restoration efforts have come.

A new northern campus of the museum, now rising on Beijing's outskirts, aims to solve a longstanding problem: Of the Palace Museum's 1.95 million stored objects, fewer than 30,000 can be displayed at any one time. It is hoped that once the new campus is complete, far more of these long-hidden works will finally be seen.

AI Learning Scam

Xinhua Daily Telegraph

December 9

In China, the latest type of online scam involves turning AI into fool's gold for the elderly. Training courses marketed with the promise of low barriers and high returns have found a receptive audience among older learners keen not to be left behind. Many are drawn in by cheap trial lessons, only to be steered toward costly programs that deliver little of substance.

The problem points to a deeper mismatch. As AI tools seep into everyday life, many older people are eager to acquire practical digital skills, such as editing videos, generating images, sharing life experiences online or even running modest online ventures of their own. For some, it is a way to stay socially connected; for others, a means of extending a sense of purpose beyond retirement. Yet the supply of courses that are affordable and specifically designed for seniors remains thin. In the absence of credible options, dubious providers have rushed in to fill the void.

To curb such fraud, regulators should strengthen action against deceptive advertising. Additionally, educators and firms should develop high-quality AI courses suited to the learning pace and needs of older adults.

SCIENTIST INTO THE ABYSS

Du Mengran, a researcher at the Institute of Deep-Sea Science and Engineering, Chinese Academy of Sciences, has been named one of *Nature* magazine's top 10 people who shaped science in 2025 for her pioneering explorations into the ocean's ultimate frontier.

The 38-year-old geoscientist has completed over 30 dives aboard China's manned submersibles. Serving as chief scientist aboard the *Fendouzhe*, Du led an expedition to the Kuril-Kamchatka Trench in the northwest Pacific in 2024. At the bottom of the trench, she and her colleagues identified the deepest-known ecosystem with animals on Earth.

Du obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Ocean University of China and her Ph.D. from the Texas A&M University in the United States. Liang Wenfeng, founder of Chinese AI firm DeepSeek, has also been selected for the top 10.

"Tsonyi County has been my home for 15 years. Those glimmers of hope from the 'no-man's land' deserve to be remembered."

Local official **Sangda Tsomo**, commenting on the upcoming film *Puruo Gangri*, which depicts the developmental journey of Tsonyi, China's highest-altitude county

"Before, a Chinese episode might sell for a few thousand U.S. dollars. Now, strong titles can sell for more than $100,000 per episode. However, economic value is only part of the story. The deeper significance lies in culture."

Zhao Yifang, CEO of Huace Group, at a promotion event for historical drama *Swords Into Plowshares* during the 26th Asia TV Forum and Market in Singapore on December 4

A community in Nanhu District of Jiaxing City, Zhejiang Province

COVER STORY

ZHEJIANG'S COUNTRYSIDE CODE

In the fields, a quiet revolution is unfolding: powered by Gen Z, planned by professionals and liked by millions online By Tao Xing

Editor's Note: From November 30 to December 7, several China International Communications Group media outlets, including *Beijing Review*, *China Today*, China.org.cn, *China Report ASEAN* and *China Pictorial*, visited multiple villages and towns in Huzhou, Jiaxing and Ningbo cities in Zhejiang Province to explore the transformation currently underway in China's rural areas.

Fifty-five-year-old Shi Yizhong never imagined fireflies could become the foundation of a serious business. In 2022, Longshan Village in Huzhou's Wuxing District collaborated with a young entrepreneurial team to create a firefly campsite—a natural attraction where visitors can observe these glowing insects in a preserved habitat. The site quickly drew waves of tourists coming to visit and share their experience online, recouping its initial investment in just two years.

"In our village, there is a group of young entrepreneurs full of creativity. Our stance is clear: We strongly support them," said Shi, head of Longshan Village. "If their proposals are easy to understand, we push forward right away. Even when an idea isn't immediately clear to us, as long as it's feasible, we support it just the same."

Longshan has encouraged young people who left to pursue studies and careers in cities to return to start businesses and settle locally. What was once a depopulated village has now transformed into an energetic mountain community featuring homestays, cafés, campsites, restaurants and a variety of small enterprises. These diverse ventures reinforce one another, steadily increasing visitor numbers and building a sustainable local economy.

The story of Longshan is a microcosm of Zhejiang's pursuit of common prosperity. In 2021, China unveiled multiple measures for building a demonstration zone ▸▸

to achieve common prosperity through high-quality development in Zhejiang. Over the past five years, the province has focused on this mission, narrowing gaps between urban and rural areas, between regions, and between income groups—leading to more equitable progress in society.

Common prosperity is a goal China has vowed to largely achieve by the mid-21st century. It means that all Chinese people will be better off as China evolves and no one is left behind. Policies will be tilted in favor of rural areas, less developed regions and vulnerable groups to promote fairness and prevent wealth polarization.

According to data from the Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, the per-capita disposable incomes of urban and rural residents in 2024 ranked third and second nationwide, respectively. The urban-rural income ratio narrowed from 1.96 in 2021 to 1.83. Zhejiang's per-capita GDP rose from $14,600 in 2020 to $19,000 in 2024, and is expected to surpass $20,000 this year, a benchmark held by many experts as the threshold of a developed economy.

Beautiful villages, beautiful economy

"Ecology is our biggest attraction for tourists!" a guide in Yucun Village, Huzhou's Anji County, told *Beijing Review*. Since 2005, when all the mines in the village were closed, the village has been exploring new ways to achieve sustainable development and prosperity. Guided by the principle that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets," or "green is gold," the village has evolved into a nationally renowned scenic area and was recognized as one of the Best Tourism Villages by the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 2021.

President Xi Jinping, then Secretary of the CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee, first introduced the concept that "green is gold" during a visit to Yucun on August 15, 2005.

In 2024, the village received 1.22 million tourist visits, and its thriving cultural tourism industry has effectively driven the development of local specialty businesses such as homestays and bamboo crafts.

In recent years, the village has also fostered new industries, including digital publishing, Yu Xiaoping, Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Yucun Village Branch, said.

The CPC is China's governing party. According to the CPC Constitution, Party organizations in villages—branches, general branches and committees—provide leadership over work in all areas in their localities to enhance community-level social governance. A village Party organization secretary is elected by Party members there. The secretary is also often elected by villagers to head the villagers' committee, an organization for a village's self-management.

Economic Growth of Zhejiang Province

(Data source: *Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, designed by China.org.cn*)

In Changxing County, which neighbors Anji, ecological advantages have also been successfully transformed into economic benefits. In the Baduka Scenic Area, villagers sell their agricultural products at the market, while tourists pause to take pictures under ginkgo trees or enjoy a leisurely coffee in one of the cafés housed in renovated old buildings. The area is famous for a 12.5-km-long ginkgo corridor, dotted with over 30,000 pristine ginkgo trees along the way.

"In the past, we sold ginkgo nuts; now, we sell scenery," Wang Chunhua, Secretary of the CPC Branch of Dakakou Village, a village in the scenic area, explained.

To foster shared growth between businesses and the scenic area, Dakakou has launched an incentive program: a portion of ticket revenue is allocated to directly reward star businesses that help attract visitors to the area.

"For example, one café that has gone viral online brings tourists who specifically come here to visit it. The benefits don't stop at just one business—when foot traffic increases, nearby restaurants, inns, and cultural and creative shops also see their business thrive," Wang said.

Changqin Village in Jiaxing's Nanhu District manages around 320 hectares of high-standard farmland. While historically centered on rice cultivation, the village has been quietly undergoing a transformation. In 2023, Changqin and five neighboring villages joined forces.

"At the heart of this progress are institutional innovation and the return of young talent," said Xu Zhiqiang, Secretary of the CPC Changqin Village Committee. The village has brought professional teams on board from the outset to co-design projects. Last year, it launched a youth partners initiative, offering free office space to attract young professionals. This has drawn

TAO XING

Tourists buy coffee at a café in the Baduka Scenic Area of Xiaopu Town, Huzhou City in Zhejiang Province, on December 1

in pet trainers, camping experience designers, content creators and inheritors of intangible cultural heritage.

Today, 28 specialized cooperatives, family farms and agricultural technology companies are operating in the area. They have pioneered a new model: "selling experiences." Visitors can try their hand at rice harvesting, make traditional rice cakes or enjoy coffee by the fields. As a result, the villages have become popular social media destinations, attracting growing numbers of urban residents.

Cluster-based development

The rural transformation in Zhejiang is also fueled by a strategy of regional integration and cluster-based development, a model formally promoted across the province since 2019.

One typical example is the Baduka area, which spans five villages: Xiaopu, Fangyi, Panlinan, Fangyan and the aforementioned Dakakou. In 2019, they formed a cooperative, later turned into a company, to jointly operate tourism resources led by resource-rich Fangyi. The company partners with professional firms to manage the scenic area and share profits, while each village still runs its own independent projects.

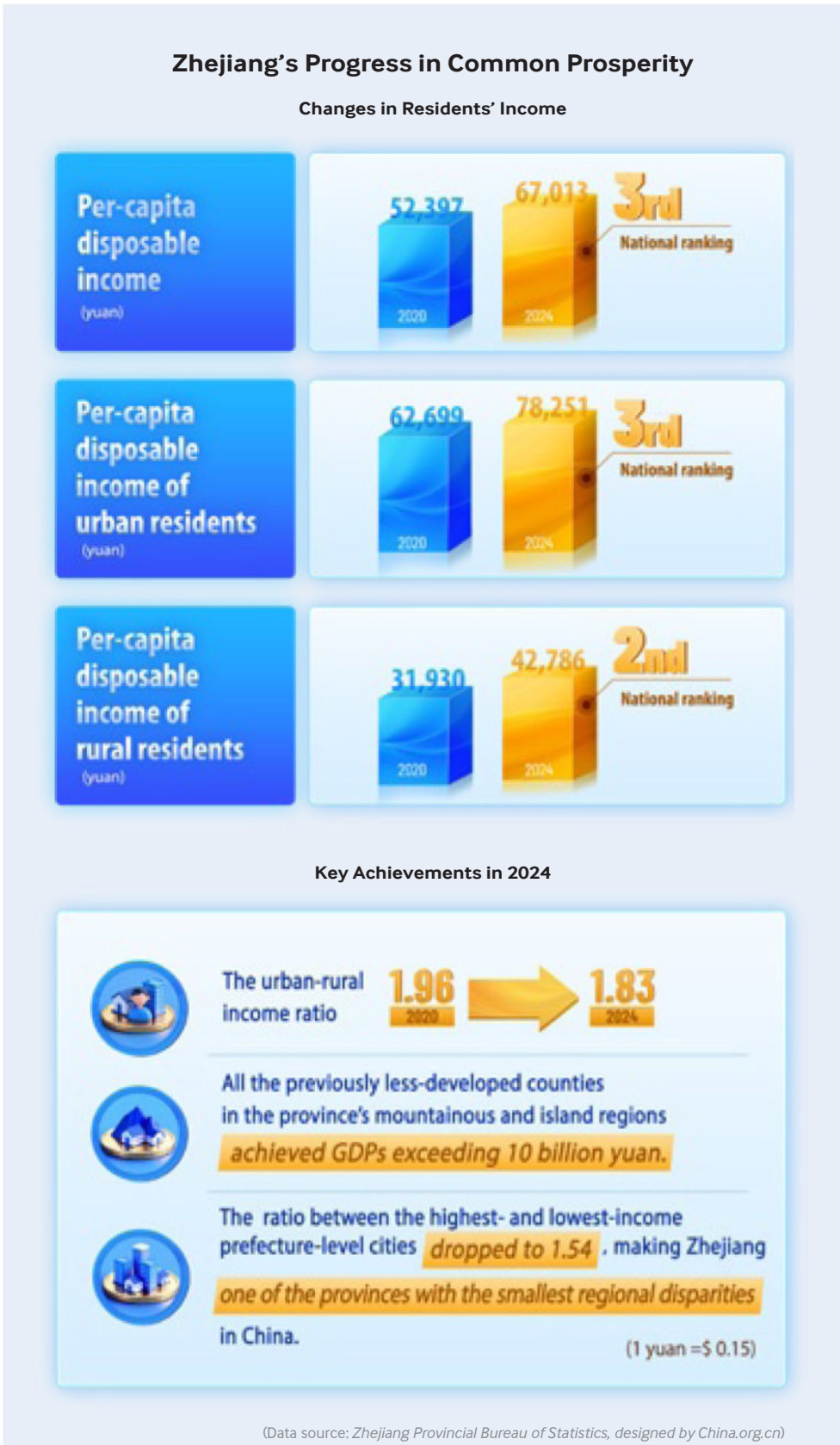
Zhou Liqiang, Secretary of the CPC Fangyi Village Branch, explained, "Each village also operates its own businesses, remaining that revenue locally."

Another model is the Greater Yucun cluster in Anji, established in 2023. It links 24 villages across 245 square km under unified planning. Each village develops distinct features to avoid competition, while together they build integrated attractions, creating a year-round tourism circuit from spring flowers and summer water activities to skiing.

This cluster approach helps break development bottlenecks and creates a sustainable system where stronger villages support weaker ones. So far, Zhejiang has built 226 provincial-level village clusters, driving growth in 1,447 surrounding villages. By 2027, the province aims to expand this to 500 key clusters benefiting over 3,000 villages.

Building a better life together

With a registered population of just over 1,000, Wandi Village in Ningbo's Yinzhou District began developing its collective economy more than 40 years ago. In 2024, its collective net assets reached 1.2 billion yuan ($170 million), with an operating income of 51.97 million



(Data source: *Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, designed by China.org.cn*)

yuan ($7.3 million). Villagers' per-capita disposable income hit 77,500 yuan ($10,976), including 27,000 yuan ($3,824) in dividends per person coming from direct cash payments distributed by the village's collective economic organization.

In China, land in a village is collectively owned by its residents. According to the Law on Rural Collective Economic Organizations, the collective economic organization of a village exercises land ownership on behalf of the residents. The organization manages village assets, conducts business activities and distributes revenue among villagers.

Another example is Miaojia Village in Jiaxing's Jiashan County. Over 30 years ago, it was economically underdeveloped, with its collective assets almost negligible. By promoting rural tourism, the village diversified its economy, created jobs and raised living standards.

"In 2024, Miaojia Village's collective revenue reached 18 million yuan ($2.5 million), with a per-capita disposable income of 59,000 yuan ($8,354)," said Huang Qinyan, a villager and guide at the local history museum. Over 30 years ago, the per-capita annual income of villagers was less than 1,000 yuan ($141.6).

Miaojia Village has over 1,100 residents aged 60 and above. In addition to providing them with pensions, the village built a community canteen last year, allocating more than 200,000 yuan ($28,320) annually from the local collective economic organization's revenue to subsidize meals for the elderly. Those aged 90 and above can eat at the canteen for free.

These stories show how sustained, localized development can turn once-poor villages into models of shared prosperity. **BR**

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COVER STORY

CULTURE CULTIVATES

When art meets agriculture, every village becomes a canvas By Peng Yao

The fertile soil of the countryside is also rich in artistic inspiration. "If farmers pick up a brush, they can become artists. If one does something with pure devotion, a stroke of genius will follow," Miao Huixin, a cultural envoy to Shengfeng Village of Youchegang Town, Xiuzhou District in Jiaxing City, Zhejiang Province, said. Miao is acclaimed as "China's rural Picasso" and was once featured by *TIME* magazine as one of 10 outstanding Asian artists.

A demonstration zone for common prosperity, Zhejiang has pioneered the cultural envoy system nationwide, selecting renowned cultural figures to assist townships in advancing cultural development.

Xiuzhou farmer paintings have become some of the most striking cultural symbols in the region due to their exaggerated shapes, bright colors, rich compositions and distinctive water-town charm. In March, a farmer painting class opened in Shengfeng Village, where 22 students were taught painting and creative techniques by Miao, bringing the daily life of the fields into their artworks.

According to Miao, 90 percent of the students come from nearby villages, including children and seniors residing in nursing homes. "Some students had no prior painting experience. For them, painting is a way to express their inner emotions with colors and images. Through this process, they develop their own aesthetic judgment, which is in turn a form of self-cultivation, observation and reflection."

Thanks to municipal funding, the painting class not only waives tuition and material fees, but also provides participants with subsidies. Over the course of four months, the students used their spare time to learn and create paintings, each producing four works.

In late September, the Xiuzhou Creation Base for Chinese Modern Folk Painting hosted the We Live Here farmer painting exhibition, showcasing the students' creations. The exhibition will run until January 1, 2026, and will then move to the nearby Jiaxing Cultural and Art Center.

"I have held painting exhibitions abroad, and many international friends appreciate farmer paintings, viewing them as a sincere expression of inner emotions with an exotic charm," Miao said. He said he believes that some students, if they continue to delve deeper into art, can become independent artists and their works may even be sold worldwide. The painting class can also inspire other villagers, helping them realize that painting is not a difficult task.

Currently, Xiuzhou is home to one farmer painting art gallery, 32 creation bases and talent pools for farmer paintings, and a team of over 2,000 farmer painters.

Wu Haimei is one of the students in Miao's painting class. Years ago, she was moved by Miao's works, which sparked her interest in paintings. "I am a native rural girl from Youchegang Town and work in social security. I paint in my spare time, infusing my works with the love I have for my hometown."

LIZHUOXI

A self-portrait by Wu Haimei, a local resident, at an exhibition themed We Live Here in Xiuzhou District, Jiaxing City in Zhejiang Province

In 2017, Wu participated in a painting class in Youchegang. This year, she rejoined the class and created four self-portraits, impressing viewers with bold colors and freestyle brushstrokes.

"Since I started painting, I've become more patient in dealing with people and feel a great sense of accomplishment. I've attended many training sessions with excellent teachers, and their unwavering passion for painting deeply moves me," Wu said. She runs a small studio in neighboring Maijia Village, where she offers locals free training. She believes that "everyone can create and become an artist."

Since 2001, Xiuzhou has held a farmer painting festival every two to three years, showcasing over 2,500 works. The district has also taken these paintings abroad, organizing exhibitions in more than 20 countries while nurturing local painting collectives and providing free training for roughly 10,000 residents.

Beyond exhibitions, Xiuzhou has successfully integrated this folk art into its rural economy. By establishing a dedicated painting arts company, it has developed nearly 200 cultural derivative products—generating an output value of 25.66 million yuan ($3.6 million) and turning local creativity into sustainable income. **BR**

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COVER STORY

FIELD OF DREAMS

How a village makes baseball its business By Liu Ting

In Xujiadai, a small village in east China, baseball, a niche sport in the country, has become an engine for rural growth. To date, the village, located in Jiaxing City, Zhejiang Province, has hosted over 100 baseball and softball tournaments, earning it the title of China's No.1 Baseball Village.

A decade ago, most villagers in Xujiadai were engaged in pig farming. In recent years, as China advanced nationwide rural environmental improvement efforts, the village also undertook cleanup initiatives. In 2017, when Liu Jianqun became secretary of the village's Party branch, he faced a pressing question: How could the village achieve sustainable development after cleaning up its environment?

The turning point came from an observant insight. At the time, Pinghu, the county-level city in Jiaxing which Xujiadai is part of, hosted many businesses run by entrepreneurs from China's Taiwan Province and Japan. Liu, a former corporate manager, noticed that these businesspeople would often travel to nearby Shanghai on weekends to play baseball and socialize.

After clearing the village's pig farms, a low-lying, waterlogged plot at the village entrance sat unused. Liu developed a bold idea: transforming it into a baseball stadium. This would attract businesspeople from nearby areas, promote sports culture and boost tourism.

From site surveys and planning to land acquisition and construction, Liu led the villagers through each phase. In just a few months, they managed to turn the once-barren land into a functional youth baseball stadium.

A tournament hub

In late 2018, the stadium opened and soon hosted its first event: the Third Little Deer League Autumn Baseball Tournament, featuring teams from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, as well as Shanghai. The response surprised everyone: over 20 teams participated.

"We never imagined this seemingly niche sport had so many enthusiasts," Liu said.

In 2019, the village hosted a national youth baseball championship—a move that soon drew the attention of the Chinese Baseball Association. After an inspection visit, association officials were impressed: It was rare in China for a village to place such emphasis on the sport.

As a result, since 2020, the National Youth Baseball Championship of China has been regularly held there, establishing the village as a recognized tournament base for the sport.

As tournaments grew, the original youth baseball stadium became inadequate. Xujiadai invested 50 million yuan ($7 million) to build an international baseball stadium. In July, the 12,500-square-meter international stadium, double the size of the original one, opened, enabling the village to host international adult baseball and softball events. To date, the village has hosted over 100 baseball and softball events, turning into a rural sports hub in east China and beyond.

"In 2026, the Xujiadai baseball stadium will host 24 high-level events, for which preparations are now in full swing," Mo Yun, an official of Lindai Town, which administers Xujiadai, said.

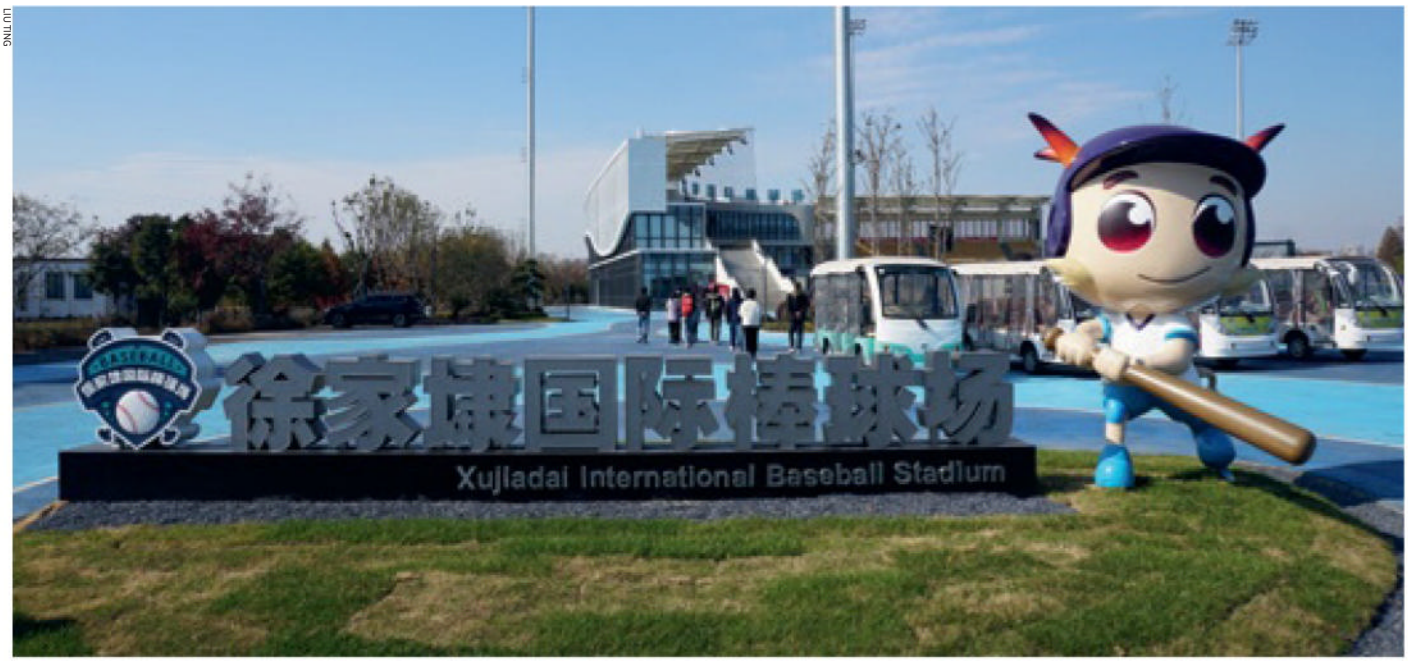
Greater benefits

The baseball events have brought notable benefits to the village.

COURTESY PHOTO

The National Youth U10 (under 10 years old) Baseball Championship is underway in Xujiadai Village, Jiaxing City in Zhejiang Province, in August

LIU TING



The Xujiadai International Baseball Stadium in Xujiadai

According to Mo, the National Youth U10 (under 10 years old) Baseball Championship this year gathered 52 teams. The 20-day event generated over 4.5 million yuan ($637,000) in total revenue.

The tournaments have significantly boosted local tourism. Agritainment restaurants see three times as many visitors compared to the off-season, and hotels in downtown Pinghu report higher occupancy. Local agricultural products are often pre-ordered and quickly sell out.

During the tournament season, the village focuses on providing accommodations and related services. In the off-season, it shifts to offering baseball-themed activities such as team-building, study tours, training programs and family-friendly options including fruit picking and day trips to the baseball park—ensuring year-round operation.

The village continues to upgrade its offerings. Beyond the stadium, it has built a multi-purpose hall for exhibitions, wedding banquets and corporate events. In the first half of this year alone, it hosted over 200 events, and lawn wedding bookings are already scheduled through 2028.

In 2024, Xujiadai received 960,000 tourists. Today, the village has developed an integrated industrial chain encompassing baseball tournaments, sports and leisure, dining and accommodation, fruit picking, and cultural experiences, providing over 500 jobs annually for villagers.

Rooting in rural life

Baseball has become not only an economic pillar of the village, but also part of local people's life. When the baseball stadium was first built, the town-level authorities of Lindai selected over 40 students to form the Little Dragons baseball club. Today, a youth training system covering U8 to U18 players is in place.

The Little Dragons team has won 18 championships to date. In 2023, they represented China to participate in the 41st U12 Men's Soft Baseball World Championship in Japan, where they secured second place.

To make the sport more accessible, the village promotes the easier-to-learn five-player baseball games and organizes farmer baseball tournaments. In 2025, these tournaments were expanded to neighboring towns for the first time, attracting over 100 participants.

Xujiadai has also integrated baseball with local intangible cultural heritage, including dragon dance performances and boat racing competitions. During major tournaments or festivals, these traditional performances are held alongside baseball games, enhancing the events' appeal.

Xujiadai is only one of the regions in Zhejiang boosting local development through sport events. The province is developing distinctive sports industries as a means to promote urban-rural integration and common prosperity, developing towns specializing in sports or outdoor activities like paddleboarding, according to the provincial authorities.

"The Xujiadai model could be expanded to more regions. But the key lies in selecting a distinctive sport, and launching targeted and professional operations to boost rural growth, improve villager income and drive rural-urban integration," Mo said. **BR**

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HOMEWARD TO PROSPERITY

How a young woman's return to her rural root promotes its revival By Antony Hardi

History has never been driven by comfort, nor shaped solely by inheritance. Its most significant turning points have emerged from those with youth, conviction and courage ingrained in them. Progress starts when young people not only dream but also take action. Sometimes, the boldest move is not to run toward the glow of cities, but to turn back—to one's soil, roots and forgotten home—and help it flourish.

This is the story of Wang Ying, a young woman who could have stayed in the city, yet chose instead to return to the quiet hills and bamboo forests of Longshan Village in Miaoxi Town of Huzhou City, Zhejiang. Her decision was more than personal; it opened a new chapter for China's countryside—a chapter where talent flows homeward, not away.

The choice to return

Wang, a Zhejiang Gongshang University graduate, once held a secure and well-paid job in finance. She had what many young professionals pursue: stability, opportunity and the bright pulse of city life. But another question tugged at her: What becomes of the village that raised you, once the young people have all gone? Who tends to the old houses, the fading culture and the senior waiting quietly at their gates?

Wang's turning point arrived in 2017, during her time at a small homestay in Viet Nam. The warmth of local hospitality struck her deeply. It reminded her of her own hometown—lush green hills and tea fields—yet overlooked, undervalued and slowly aging. She realized that Longshan could offer the same sense of refuge and authenticity, if only someone would begin.

So, in 2018, she resigned, packed her bags, and went home.

The land was unchanged, the air was clean, and the forests still whispered. But the village felt as though it had paused in time. Shops were quiet, houses empty and opportunity thin. She could have turned back—but instead she looked forward. Where others saw decline, she saw a canvas.

Seeing promises rather than past

Wang began not by thinking of what the village lacked, but by recognizing what it already possessed: land, memory, and a rural warmth that cities could never imitate. Yet resources alone do not create prosperity—they require vision, method and will.

Old farmhouses could become inviting homestays. Centuries-old tea culture could transform into guest experiences. Idle villagers could be trained as hosts, artisans and storytellers. Work could return to hands long still, and dignity could return to those who once felt left behind.

COURTESY PHOTO

Wang Ying in her hometown in Longshan Village, Miaoxi Town of Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province

Change, however, demanded more than ideas. It required patience, conversation and persuasion. She went door to door, listening rather than instructing—asking what villagers hoped for, what skills they held, and what futures they imagined. Trust grew slowly but surely, and with it, collaboration.

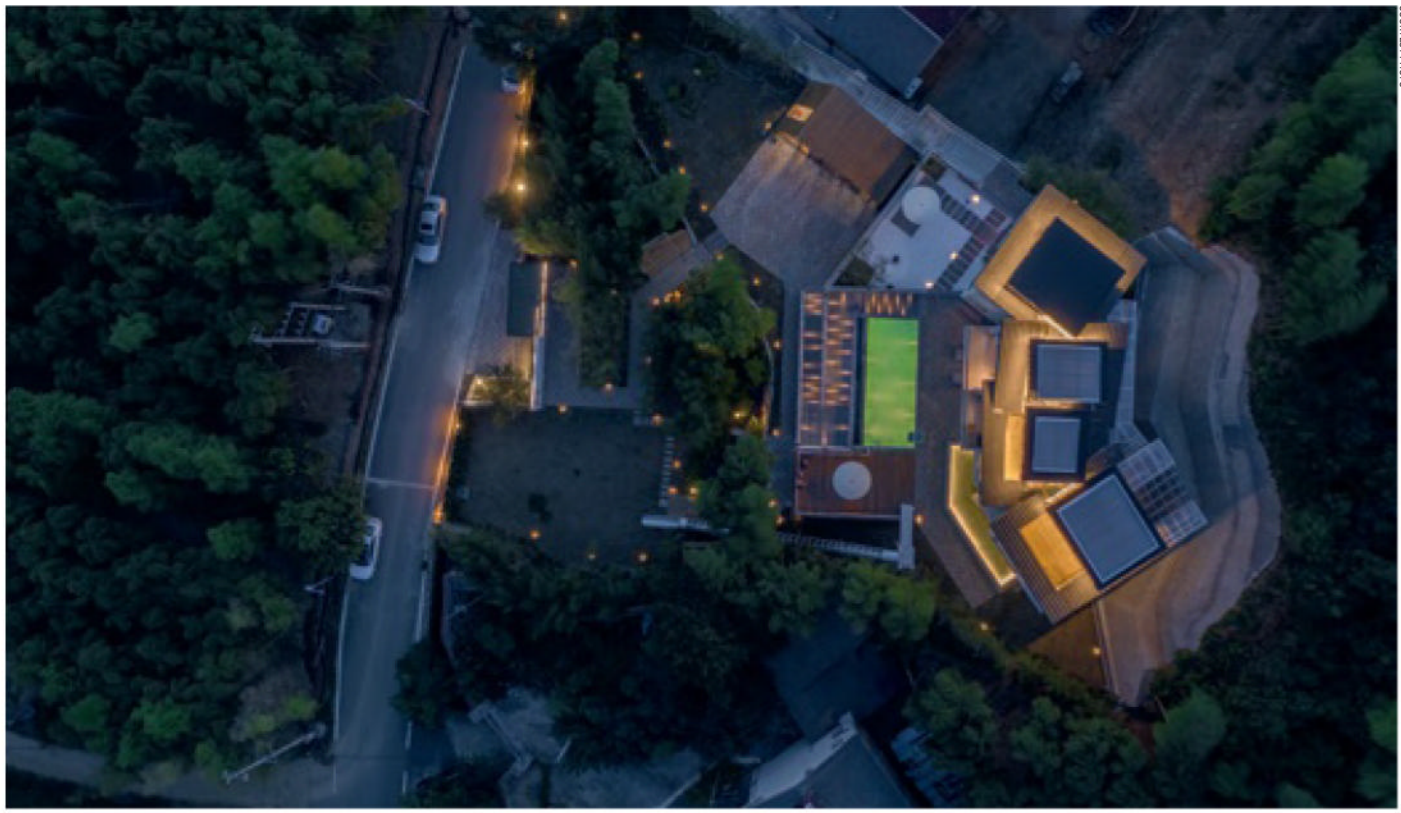
A village breathes again

Among the abandoned homes stood one old building—weathered, cracked but enduring. Many villagers walked past it as though passing a memory. Wang paused and envisioned life within it.

She gathered carpenters, builders, young laborers and elderly women who remembered the house in its prime. They restored with respect rather than replaced with extravagance: clay walls re-smoothed, beams reinforced yet left visible, courtyards brightened and planted. The renovation centered on the tea heritage of Miaoxi Town, birthplace of *The Classic of Tea*—a book about tea culture written by scholar and writer Lu Yu of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The design invited guests not only to stay, but to immerse, to slow down, and to belong.

When the doors opened to the public in June 2019, there were no banners—only sunlight, bamboo shadows and fresh tea in ceramic cups. At the height of the rise of Xiaohongshu, a social platform also known as RedNote, Wang shared the homestay online. A slide, an infinity pool and its serene beauty caught much attention. Bookings arrived before the official launch.

Guests traveled from Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing and beyond. They came seeking simplicity; they found



COURTESY PHOTO

Homestays in Longshan Village

peace. Mornings smelled of mist and tea leaves. Afternoons led them through bamboo forests or into hands-on tea-making workshops with village elders. Nights ended with rain drops tapping roof tiles like the memory of an old poem.

Miaoxi Town was not just accommodation; it was an experience. And prosperity followed.

Income from the homestay did not settle in one pair of hands. It flowed outward—toward farmers, weavers, cooks, cleaners and storytellers.

Villagers learned hospitality skills. Elders taught visitors to weave bamboo baskets. Women who once thought they had little to offer began hosting pickling workshops or sewing quilts for guest rooms. Even vegetables found new value—no longer merely produce, but dishes rooted in land and season.

With work came routine, with routine came dignity. Laughter returned to courtyards, shutters opened to sunlight and footsteps echoed along once-quiet paths. Miaoxi was no longer a forgotten dot on the map. It became a place worth traveling to, worth investing in and worth returning for.

Agriculture becomes identity

Tourism revived hearts, but agriculture remained the village's roots. Longshan's tea, bamboo shoots and seasonal crops were of high quality, yet were previously sold cheaply by intermediaries. Wang saw potential in branding and storytelling. With improved packaging and quality control, ordinary produce became cultural products—gifts that carried the scent of earth and history.

Agriculture was no longer humble; it became meaningful, aesthetic and valuable.

The most profound transformation happened among the elderly. Many once anticipated only quiet years. Yet with industry reborn, they rediscovered worth. A woman skilled in pickling became a teacher; a retired craftsman instructed children in weaving; grandparents became custodians of memory, paid for experience rather than tolerated for aging.

To date, cultural and tourism projects have created more than 50 permanent jobs and over 3,000 flexible employment opportunities in Longshan Village. Per-capita income has risen by more than 30,000 yuan ($4,248). Last year, the village's collective revenue reached 1.38 million yuan ($195,400). Numbers, however, tell only part of the story. What changed most was confidence.

The village became a place not simply to live, but to aspire in.

Wang's story is not simply personal. It represents the future of China's countryside—modern not by becoming urban, but by becoming its truest self.

Her journey reminds us that progress does not always require departure. Sometimes, the most forward step is homeward—back to soil, back to roots, back to places history almost forgot. When young people return, villages bloom. When villages bloom, a nation booms. **BR**

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COVER STORY

FROM MEGACITIES TO MEADOWS

Walking through China's living rural blueprint By Devinder Kumar

As an Indian journalist who has lived and worked in China for more than a decade, I have witnessed firsthand the astounding pace of China's urban transformation—high-speed rail networks linking megacities, digital payment systems changing people's daily life, smart manufacturing rising across industrial zones, and modern infrastructure spreading across the nation. Yet, my recent eight-day media tour to Zhejiang Province in east China offered a new and deeply thought-provoking perspective.

For the first time, I experienced rural China not just through data or policy reports, but up close, walking through villages, meeting local residents, interviewing officials and entrepreneurs, and observing the real dynamics behind China's rural revitalization and common prosperity model. (China's rural revitalization, a strategy introduced at the 19th Communist Party of China National Congress in 2017, promotes the economic prosperity and overall development of rural areas. It builds on the success of the nationwide poverty alleviation campaign that had eradicated absolute poverty as of late 2020—*Ed.*)

The tour took us across Ningbo, Huzhou and Jiaxing, three cities that have become showcases of China's ambition to build a high-quality development demonstration zone for common prosperity. I visited more than 10 villages, industrial projects, rural tourism communities, cultural innovation parks, eco-agriculture zones, art and heritage centers, and modern cooperative agricultural bases.

Although I have explored many places in China over the years—from Beijing to Kashgar, from Shenzhen to Harbin—this journey was different. It revealed how China's countryside has become a laboratory for innovation, shaping new models that elevate not only economics but also dignity, culture, environment and community values. And it raised an important reflection for me, as an Indian: What lessons can India draw from China's rural transformation to uplift millions of people living in villages and small towns?

Five villages joining hands

Our first stop was Wucun Baotuan (Five Villages Together), Changxing County, Huzhou. Here, five neighboring villages have created a cooperative mechanism that enables them to share resources, industries, talent and tourism revenues. Through a "strong-helping-weak" development strategy led by Fangyi Village, a tourism association was established, uniting local homestays, training shared chefs and guides, and building community workshops. Today, more than 300 villagers, particularly left-behind labor groups and low-income residents, have stable employment.

During an interview, a local representative of the tourism association said: "When villages compete, everyone loses. When we unite, everyone wins. By sharing resources and talent, we make development faster and stronger."

This model offers a critical lesson: strength in unity. In India, villages often develop in isolation, lacking coordination or resource sharing. If clusters of villages collaborated on agriculture, tourism, digital enterprises or skill-training, rural value chains could expand dramatically.

The power of village-enterprise cooperation

One of the most inspiring examples was Xinchuan Village in Changxing County, built through 30 years of partnership with Tianneng Group, a leading battery technology enterprise. This village-enterprise cooperation model has transformed the village into a prosperous community. The village has become a national demonstration site for digital governance and industrial rural revitalization.

Speaking with a village leader, I heard a perspective deeply rooted in reality: "The village helps the enterprise, and the enterprise helps the village. We grow together. A good life must be built by our own hands—and through cooperation."

India's rural economy lacks such structured partnerships. While India has major corporations, they rarely work directly with villages to empower local residents. Public-private-community partnerships could become a powerful pathway for India's rural development.

Where green turns into gold

In Yucun Village of Anji County, President Xi Jinping first proposed the now-famous principle "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" in 2005. Yucun once depended on mining, which severely damaged its environment. Closing the mines seemed risky, but through eco-tourism, cultural tourism and green industries, the village reinvented itself. In 2024 alone, it welcomed 1.22 million tourists.

A villager who once worked in the mines now runs a small tourism business. He explained: "Before, we earned money by destroying our mountains. Now we earn money by protecting them. This is real development."

Walking through Yucun, breathing

CHEN XINYAN

An intelligent greenhouse in Wandi Village, Ningbo City in Zhejiang Province, on December 6

in the clean mountain air and talking with local families, I understood that sustainable growth is not just a slogan here—it is a lived reality. The contrast with many rural areas in India, suffering from pollution or lack of planned tourism, is striking. Environmental protection and economic development are not necessarily in conflict—they can reinforce each other.

Cultural innovation and youth-driven rural revitalization

In Jiaxing City, we explored how culture and digital creativity are reshaping rural spaces. The Qianliji Creative Industrial Park, transformed from old grain warehouses, is now home to international art exhibitions, immersive extended reality (XR) experiences and creative cultural products.

The young entrepreneur managing the homestay told me: "The real value of the countryside is peace, beauty and culture. People don't only travel to see scenery—they travel to feel life."

The Himalaya Taocang Ideal Village project in the park blends digital music festivals, virtual reality theaters, immersive libraries and homestays, attracting young travelers and entrepreneurs.

The project director told me: "Culture attracts young people, technology retains them and industry supports them."

Meanwhile, the modern folk painting base in Xiuzhou District of Jiaxing, rooted in 40 years of local artistic tradition, has trained nearly 2,000 rural painters, many of whom now sell artwork internationally. Art here is not an elite hobby—it is a pathway to economic empowerment and cultural confidence.

India, with its rich folk arts and music traditions, can learn much from this model. Too often Indian craft communities struggle due to lack of branding, digital access, or infrastructure. If creative industries were integrated into village development, rural cultural heritage could become a strong economic engine.

Farm-to-market modernization

Another highlight was visiting an agricultural innovation center: the Tiangong Smart Agriculture Base in Wandi Village, Ningbo, using digital monitoring and automated greenhouses to increase production efficiency and reduce labor intensity.

This example proves that agriculture is not fading in China—it is becoming hi-tech, market-oriented and brand-driven. Smart agriculture and specialty branding could lift millions of farmers out of poverty.

A human story beyond statistics

Throughout the tour, I recorded interviews with local, elderly villagers who returned to farming, youth entrepreneurs returning from big cities, artists transforming rural traditions, and officials devoted to public service. Their confidence and pride made a deep impression. Rural revitalization in China is not just infrastructure or income—it is a transformation of mindset, offering dignity, opportunity and hope.

I was impressed by a young university graduate running a scenic homestay, who said, "Development is not about leaving the village but about making it a place worth returning to."

This is inspirational for India, where urban migration has emptied many rural areas.

This trip to Zhejiang changed my understanding of rural China. It showed me a countryside that is confident, modern, creative and full of opportunity. China is not only building rich cities but also empowering villages to stand strong and prosperous.

The real strength of a nation is not measured only in skyscrapers and megacities, but also in the smiles and dignity of ordinary people living in its villages. **BR**

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Reading Between the Lines

By Joseph Gregory Mahoney

In recent weeks, many analysts and pundits have offered numerous interpretations of the U.S.' new National Security Strategy, published by the White House on December 4, "reading the tea leaves," trying to divine what's altogether new and what simply remains. Is the U.S. retreating or advancing? Is it respecting China or advancing the first and second island chain strategies?

(The terms "first island chain" and "second island chain" are strategic concepts in geopolitics and military strategy, particularly within the context of U.S. defense planning in the Asia-Pacific region. These concepts are not officially defined U.S. Government strategies but are widely discussed in strategic studies—*Ed.*)

The document's central argument is that both the U.S. and the world have been changed fundamentally by one man in the months since President Donald Trump's second inauguration early this year.

Yet regrettably, it's impossible here to refute all the falsehoods the text asserts. But this was expected from a president and a nation that depend on such nonsense to perpetuate the myth of American superiority, including the basic assertion that Washington has both the will and capacity to dominate global affairs, above all because it is now more powerful and respected.

Sticking with and expanding NATO, to Russia's dismay, while buying vast quantities of cheap energy from Russia to America's dismay, was a recipe for disaster, and all the more so because it mistook dependencies as opportunities for exploitation

The continuities that persist?

This kind of propaganda is nothing new. No doubt we all recall the pretense of principles asserted by Joe Biden's presidency, the return to democracy having saved the U.S. from an alleged coup attempt by Trump, followed by targeting "authoritarian" states guilty of resisting American imperialism while triggering a war against Russia.

Consequently, as Marxists, we must return to the fundamental question: What fundamental changes have happened in the American mode of production, its economic base and superstructure? Strip away the superficial cult of personality and what are the fundamental changes in American foreign policy? Or, more to the point, what are the continuities that persist despite shifting tactics?

Let's give one example of a Marxist reading of U.S. foreign policy toward Europe, since so many Europeans are fixated on what they view as Trump's abandonment of shared principles and perhaps even shared security, and his willful meddling in European politics, encouraging a renaissance of rightwing parties.

The U.S. has long found itself strategically at odds with the European Union, formally founded by the Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force in November 1993.

While it would be unfair to assert the EU and the euro were created solely to resist U.S. hegemony, many believe this was an important motivation. These projects did not realize their full potential, in part due to disparate values and development levels in the EU, which prevented market harmonization and an effective federal system, but also because the European approach to counterbalancing the U.S. and Russia produced unsustainable, contradictory dependencies. In short, sticking with and expanding NATO, to Russia's dismay, while buying vast quantities of cheap energy from Russia to America's dismay, was a recipe for disaster, and all the more so because it mistook dependencies as opportunities for exploitation.

The bottom line is that the U.S. did provoke a proxy war in Ukraine, one that all but cut off Europe from cheaper Russian fuel supplies (even though European purchases of Russian energy by some estimates in 2024 still exceeded European contributions to Ukraine). Meanwhile, Europe has turned to the U.S. to help meet energy needs. This was always a U.S. strategic objective, as was reinforcing the U.S. dollar in its specific function as the petrodollar.

A question: How can the U.S. meet increased energy demands? The Biden administration—supposedly the green alternative to Trump—made more fossil fuels available by expanding energy production in once-sacrosanct areas of Alaska, which Trump now embraces as a radical return to oil contra "woke lunacies" like concerns for climate change. These are dark continuities, despite rhetorical differences from one administration to the next.

Indeed, one of the most haunting

XINHUA

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth (center) talks with Estonia's Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur (right) and Germany's Defense Minister Boris Pistorius following the NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on October 15

passages in the recently released document concerns Trump's vision of "energy dominance:" "Restoring American energy dominance (in oil, gas, coal and nuclear) and reshoring the necessary key energy components is a top strategic priority. Cheap and abundant energy will produce well-paying jobs in the U.S., reduce costs for American consumers and businesses, fuel reindustrialization, and help maintain our advantage in cutting-edge technologies such as AI. Expanding our net energy exports will also deepen relationships with allies while curtailing the influence of adversaries, protects our ability to defend our shores, and—when and where necessary—enables us to project power. We reject the disastrous 'climate change' and 'Net Zero' ideologies that have so greatly harmed Europe, threaten the U.S., and subsidize our adversaries."

The strategic objectives

Later, the document states: "The Ukraine War has had the perverse effect of increasing Europe's, especially Germany's, external dependencies. Today, German chemical companies are building some of the world's largest processing plants in China, using Russian gas that they cannot obtain at home. The Trump administration finds itself at odds with European officials who hold unrealistic expectations for the war perched in unstable minority governments, many of which trample on basic principles of democracy to suppress opposition. A large European majority wants peace, yet that desire is not translated into policy, in large measure because of those governments' subversion of democratic processes."

The U.S. has largely achieved its strategic objectives in Ukraine and Europe. Here we must include the first Trump administration, which supported Brexit, further undermining the EU. The only difference between Trump and Biden is that Trump has now revealed the true face of American strategic policy by asserting that Russia isn't really a threat to Europe, at least not one that Europeans themselves can't counter collectively, as long as they move in tandem with his political vision, which also aligns with various right-twing movements in Europe. We can therefore understand this new document as advancing his and Biden's efforts to meddle in European affairs.

Consequently, the political and economic traps have been fully exercised from one president to the next, reflecting a deeper logic in U.S. strategic thinking: the logic of hegemony and imperialism. And we need not invoke the "cunning of reason" to illustrate the underlying conspiracy. Some might consider it a twist of fate that it was the Europeans who invented these kinds of dark international games and then allowed themselves to believe they had somehow transcended the same while freeriding morally on U.S. power and Russia energy, only to find such "principles" denuded.

And yet now, we're seeing some European critics pointing to the hagiographic elements of the new strategy and saying this has more to do with Trump than the U.S. This perspective risks neglecting the strategic continuities from Trump to Biden to Trump and plays into quixotic and still lingering hopes U.S. foreign policy will swing in the opposite direction in future elections. **BR**

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U.S. National Security Strategy 2025: The Pursuit of Primacy Repackaged

By Brian Berletic

The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy, published on December 4, reaffirms America's decades-spanning policy of pursuing global domination, emphasizing "burden sharing" in recognition of both the multipolar world's growing capabilities and the growing limitations of the U.S. itself.

Despite the obvious intentions, the paper expresses, many have mistakenly interpreted it as signaling U.S. abandonment of global primacy, seeking to end confrontation with Russia—and even China.

Some have gone as far as suggesting the U.S. seeks to "shift focus" toward the Western hemisphere, yet even the paper's introduction dashes this wishful thinking.

Bragging of wars and threats

Trump's forward includes boasting about U.S. strikes against Iran as well as the build up toward war with Venezuela. He also boasted about the unprecedented $1 trillion recently poured into the U.S. war machine and the vast increase in NATO spending by member states he imposed—investments that would be unnecessary were the U.S. in any way "shifting focus" from continued containment of Russia, Iran and China, toward the Western hemisphere.

The paper discusses "reviving" the U.S. military industrial base to provide "the most capable high-end systems necessary for a conflict with a sophisticated enemy," a sophisticated enemy that does not exist anywhere in the Western hemisphere—clearly referring to Russia and/or China.

The paper admits the failure of "globalism" as a means of establishing "permanent American domination of the entire world," yet admits the primary objective of the strategy is to "ensure that America remains the world's strongest, richest, most powerful and most successful country for decades to come," or in other words, to ensure continued U.S. primacy over the globe.

This continued primacy requires encroachment upon and the containment of rival powers including both Russia and China. How else could the U.S.—with 25 percent the population of China, smaller industrial base, less-developed infrastructure and millions fewer STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) graduates per year than China—remain "the world's strongest, richest, most powerful and most successful country," without hindering, sabotaging or otherwise setting back rising powers like China?

The rest of the paper is simply a revision of long-standing plans to do exactly that.

What the U.S. wants

The paper outlines what it calls "core, vital national interests," including a desire to dominate the Western hemisphere under the guise of fighting "narco-terrorists." However, the paper eventually admits it seeks to prevent Latin America from pursuing independent foreign policies including cooperation with "non-hemispheric competitors" like China and Russia.

Regarding China specifically, the paper reiterates the U.S. seeks to keep "the Indo-Pacific free and open, preserving freedom of navigation in all crucial sea lanes, and maintaining secure and reliable supply chains and access to critical materials."

Since the vast majority of traffic through these "crucial sea lanes" is coming from or going to China, this translates to the continued U.S. military buildup across the Asia-Pacific region, specifically around the South China Sea and other sea lanes designated as chokepoints the U.S. seeks to economically strangle China with.

The mention of "supply chains" and "access to critical materials" refers to the necessity of decoupling America's dependency on China for both, allowing a U.S. blockade to cripple China without impacting America's own economic and industrial power.

In regards to Europe (including Russia), the paper claims the U.S. seeks to "support" allies in "preserving the freedom and security of Europe," both of which the U.S. itself upended through the overthrow of Ukraine in 2014, the arming of Ukraine under the first Trump administration, and the continued proxy war the U.S. has waged against Russia in Ukraine ever since.

While the paper states a desire to "avoid" America's "forever wars" fought across the Middle East, it seeks to do so by preventing "an adversarial power from dominating" the region. This means eliminating nations like Iran and organizations like Lebanon-based transnational Shiite Islamist group Hezbollah and to do so by replacing long-term large-scale war with proxy war punctuated by short, intense acts of U.S. military aggression—hence the strikes the Trump administration already launched on Iran earlier this year.

How will the U.S. get what it wants?

Far from withdrawing from its pursuit of global primacy, the U.S. clearly seeks to continue imposing itself worldwide, from Latin America to Eurasia—and everywhere in between.

The means through which it seeks to continue this pursuit—as stated by the paper itself—include the use of economic, financial and military power as well as "soft power" (continued political interference and regime change worldwide).

The paper, however, recognizes U.S. limitations in doing so, requiring a strategy often referred to as "division of labor," or "burden sharing."

It explicitly explains: "…the U.S. will organize a burden-sharing network, with our government as convener and supporter. This approach ensures that burdens are shared and that all such efforts benefit from broader legitimacy. The model will be targeted partnerships that use economic tools to align incentives, share burdens with like-minded allies, and insist on reforms that anchor long-term stability. This strategic clarity will allow the U.S. to counter hostile and subversive influences efficiently while avoiding the overextension and diffuse focus that undermined past efforts."

Thus, far from abandoning its "allies," the U.S. is instead stitching them into a "burden-sharing network" it can use against designated adversaries (including Russia and especially China) wringing from this network additional resources to pursue U.S. foreign policy objectives, avoiding U.S. "overextension," all at the expense of the network's members. It is a strategy the Trump administration already proposed—using Europe to take over greater costs and risk amid the ongoing war in Ukraine against Russia, freeing up U.S. resources toward containing China in the Asia-Pacific.

The paper provides an example of how this network will be used against China too—in the "first island chain" (including China's island province of Taiwan), or the first string of major Pacific archipelagos out from the East Asian continental mainland coast, explaining: "We will build a military capable of denying aggression anywhere in the 'first island chain.' But the American military cannot, and should not have to, do this alone. Our allies must step up and spend—and more importantly do—much more for collective defense. America's diplomatic efforts should focus on pressing our 'first island chain' allies and partners to allow the U.S. military greater access to their ports and other facilities, to spend more on their own defense, and most importantly to invest in capabilities aimed at deterring aggression."

XINHUA

People attend the opening ceremony of the People's Assembly for Peace and Sovereignty of Our America in Caracas, capital of Venezuela, on December 9. The event focused on the U.S. military threat, transnational crime in the region and the Monroe Doctrine, a U.S. foreign policy principle introduced by President James Monroe in 1823, asserting that the Western Hemisphere (the Americas) was off-limits to further European colonization or interference, and that the U.S. would view any such efforts as acts of aggression

The most recent National Security Strategy outlines the continued pursuit of U.S. primacy worldwide. It pays lip service to ideas like a "genuinely mutually advantageous economic relationship with Beijing," while laying out in great detail plans to continue America's military encroachment and containment of China just beyond its own shores. It claims it seeks an "expeditious cessation of hostilities in Ukraine," while expanding NATO spending and demanding Europe prepare to defend itself against an unnamed "adversary from dominating Europe" (likely Russia).

Thus, while it may be tempting for some to cherry-pick quotes from the document to indulge in wishful thinking regarding a positive shift in U.S. foreign policy, the paper outlines what has been referred to for decades as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, a U.S. defense strategy blueprint drafted in 1992 during the presidency of George H.W. Bush that basically argued for the conscious and active maintenance of U.S. global primacy by preventing the rise of any rival, bolstered by an unprecedented military buildup, the creation of a "burden-sharing network" and simply resold as "MAGA"—"Make America Great Again." **BR**

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Smoke and Mirrors on The Taiwan Question

By Liang Xiao

Traditionally, the U.S. president releases the National Security Strategy (NSS) report at the end of the first year of each term. As a core strategic document guiding U.S. domestic and foreign policy, it influences federal budget allocation and policy priorities, thus drawing considerable global attention.

Beyond Latin America and domestic security, the Indo-Pacific region ranks as the next strategic priority, with the Taiwan question featuring prominently. Across just three paragraphs, "Taiwan" appears eight times—reflecting concerns that extend well beyond security and defense to encompass the semiconductor supply chain. The report emphasizes Taiwan Island's critical position in the global semiconductor industry, framing it as essential to the technological and industrial security of the U.S. and its allies.

Compared to the previous version, the report adopts a markedly more aggressive posture on the Taiwan question. It asserts that preventing cross-Straits conflict is "best achieved by maintaining overwhelming military superiority," explicitly elevating "deterring conflict in the Taiwan Straits" to a national strategic priority. It further pledges to build military forces capable of defeating "acts of aggression" anywhere along the "first island chain"—a U.S. geopolitical concept referring to the arc of islands stretching from the Aleutian Islands in the north Pacific Ocean, through the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyu Islands, and China's Taiwan Island, down to the Philippines in the Western Pacific. The report also calls on U.S. "allies and partners" within the "first island chain" to grant U.S. forces greater access to ports and facilities, increase their own defense spending, "and most importantly to invest in capabilities aimed at deterring aggression."

These are far from empty words. Recent developments demonstrate active responses from U.S. "allies and partners" in the region: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's statement in November that armed conflict in the Taiwan Straits would trigger Japan's exercise of collective self-defense rights, and the Taiwan authorities' announcement of a $40-billion plan to build "T-Dome"—an air defense system modeled after Israel's Iron Dome—both signal concrete alignment with U.S. strategic priorities.

Notably, the Trump administration has recently sent increasingly contradictory signals on the Taiwan question. On one hand, during a November 25 phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Trump acknowledged that the U.S. understands the importance of the Taiwan question to China. Yet just one week later, on December 2, he signed the so-called "Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act (H.R. 1512)"—a measure that mandates periodic State Department reviews to lift restrictions on "U.S.-Taiwan interactions," deepens "U.S.-Taiwan military ties," and promotes Taiwan's participation in international organizations. This approach directly challenges the One-China principle and has drawn strong opposition from China.

From China's perspective, the Taiwan question is at the very core of China's central interests, the bedrock of the political foundation of China-U.S. relations, and the first red line that must not be crossed in China's relations with any other country. For the Trump administration, which seeks to improve China-U.S. relations, testing China on this issue is not an appropriate choice.

On the other hand, the NSS reaffirms that the U.S. opposes unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Straits by either side—continuing its longstanding declaratory policy of seeking to "maintain the status quo" across the Straits. However, a telling detail emerges in the terminology: Unlike the Biden administration's 2022 report, which consistently used "PRC" (People's Republic of China), the Trump 2.0 strategy exclusively employs "China," which it may think is a broader, more encompassing designation.

Yet this terminology may also reveal a deeper American calculus on the Taiwan question: The U.S. has few cards left to play. As China's comprehensive national power continues to grow, Washington can no longer guarantee dominance in the Western Pacific. If the U.S. cannot contain China within the "first island chain," the most pragmatic course may be to extract maximum strategic value from the region—and ultimately use the "first island chain" itself as leverage in negotiations with China.

This also explains why Washington has pressured Japan, the Republic of Korea and especially Taiwan region to relocate semiconductor manufacturing to the U.S., while simultaneously expanding arms sales throughout the region. On the Taiwan question, the U.S. is engaged in strategic bluffing—needing to appease domestic China hawks and the military-industrial complex, while projecting confidence to its allies. In reality, however, Uncle Sam is searching for an optimal exit strategy. Yet the mixed signals it sends are drawing its so-called "partners" deeper into a geopolitical vortex. **BR**

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Dignity in Development

By Lan Xinzhen

The course of human progress has shown that the rights to subsistence and development are primary basic human rights and that sustainable social and economic development provides the material foundation for realizing all human rights. Ultimately, the true measure of how well a country advances human rights lies in whether its people are able to lead happy and fulfilling lives.

"Those who only seek comfort for themselves will ultimately be rejected; those who sacrifice their own interests for the success of others will be supported."

On July 6, 2021, President Xi Jinping quoted this line in his keynote speech at the Communist Party of China and World Political Parties Summit. The quote comes from the collected works of Fang Xiaoru, a renowned scholar in the early Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It conveys the idea that people who think only of themselves will find themselves alone, whereas those who set aside their personal interests for the good of others will win popular support.

By invoking this line, Xi stressed that development is not the exclusive privilege of a few but the right of all countries. Any political manipulation aimed at hindering the development of other nations or undermining the wellbeing of their people will find little support and ultimately prove futile.

China has charted its own path to human rights improvement by effectively adopting a strategy that advances human rights through development. The country's decades-long poverty-reduction efforts have lifted nearly 800 million people out of extreme poverty, while simultaneously raising levels of education, healthcare and average life expectancy, all of which point to a substantial improvement in the country's human rights conditions.

Yet this achievement is far from universal. For most developing countries, poverty still remains the most immediate threat to human rights.

This reality is reflected in the priorities set out by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes goals such as eliminating poverty, achieving gender equality, promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, fostering full and productive employment and ensuring decent work for all. At its core is the promise of "leaving no one behind," a commitment grounded in the belief that development is a key driver of human rights.

On July 8, a China-proposed resolution titled The Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights was adopted by the 59th Session of the UN Human Rights Council. The resolution reaffirms the vital role development plays in ensuring all human rights. It also underscores how people-centered high-quality development helps meet people's growing aspirations for better quality of life while supporting the realization of all human rights.

Those who only seek comfort for themselves will ultimately be rejected; those who sacrifice their own interests for the success of others will be supported

However, the world today is still grappling with a severe development deficit, as uneven and insufficient development continues to hold back the advancement of global human rights.

A concerning gap exists in the human rights approach of some developed nations. These countries often apply human rights as a standard for diplomatic pressure, overemphasizing political rights while overlooking fundamental issues like poverty. A more balanced stance would require respecting the link between development and human rights.

Every country has its own unique national context, shaped by differences in history, culture, social system and level of development. Countries must therefore ground their efforts in their own realities and the needs of their people, and find a model of human rights development that suits their own circumstances.

The international community should strengthen cooperation to ensure that people of all nations can share in the benefits of development. Only by making global development more inclusive, equitable and sustainable can we enter a harmonious world of shared prosperity—one in which development and human rights support and reinforce each other in the building of a sustainable and dignified future for all. **BR**

Scan the QR code to watch the video

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Harmony Over Hubris

By Carlos L Garrido

Humanity finds itself today at a "nodal point" in world history, as German philosopher G.W. F. Hegel would call it. We are in the earliest stages of a leap that will mark an era for history books in the future. A new logic of international relations, of global governance, is emerging.

Three decades ago, the United States and its Western allies proclaimed, in the words of political theorist Francis Fukuyama, the "end of history." Capitalist "liberal democracy" was considered to be the culmination of human development. It was held that we were now in a "post-ideological" world.

Interestingly, this Western hubris of a post-ideological world came conjoined with the neoconservative Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a think tank (1997-2006) which championed U.S. unipolar hegemony, imperial unilateralism and the frequent use of regime change wars to spread the creed of so-called "American values."

It would seem, then, that the "post" in post-ideological simply referred to any framework which sought to challenge the PNAC paradigm developed by the architects of the new world order in Washington.

History has now shown that such bold proclamation suffered from the same hubris as Athenian statesman Pericles' Funeral Oration—the march of history couldn't have more clearly contradicted the boastful pronouncements each made.

Today a new paradigm of multilateralism and multipolarity is emerging. President Xi Jinping states in the fifth volume of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, "History has once again brought humanity's modernization process to a crossroads: Do we seek polarization or common prosperity?... A zero-sum game, or win-win cooperation?"

Modernization, as Xi holds, is an inalienable right of all countries. Such a right cannot be exercised by the bulk of humanity within the narrow confines of the PNAC and its upholding of U.S. unipolarity and unilateralism. Countries cannot modernize and develop when trapped in an endless cycle of unpayable debts to U.S. dominated global financial institutions. Sovereignty is integral to modernization.

Two logics of development and international relations are today presented to humanity.

The first seeks to perpetuate the unipolar world order based in Washington. Economically it seeks to continue making Wall Street, the Military-Industrial Complex and the whole network of U.S. controlled finance capital richer, all the while the vast majority of humanity (including regular Americans themselves) grow poorer and more indebted. Geopolitically it wants to continue a paradigm of international relations based on a zero-sum game: Either you do as the U.S. says, or you suffer the consequences—these can vary from outright war to unilateral coercive measures such as sanctions.

An alternative paradigm, however, is now evidently in the mix. It is championed by China and most other countries of the Global South. This paradigm keeps in mind the popular dictum championed by Xi, namely, that humanity lives in a community with a shared future. Our actions today build the edifice which the future descendent generations will live in collectively. In a world as globalized as ours, it is truer than ever that what we build today will genuinely be a shared future for humankind that we will be held accountable for.

XINHUA

Serbian exhibitors showcase their wine at the Eighth China International Import Expo in Shanghai on November 7

XINHUA

Technicians from China Oilfield Services Ltd. service drilling equipment in Maysan, Iraq, on November 27. The Chinese energy company has operated in the oilfields there since 2011

Thus, this alternative paradigm champions the ancient Silk Road spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. It rejects imperial unilateralism, unipolarity and zero-sum games. It affirms multilateralism, multipolarity and the logic of win-win relations between states. As Xi poetically puts it in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, "flames grow higher when everyone adds wood to the fire." "Win-win cooperation is the sure way to success in launching major initiatives that benefit all," Xi adds. "Helping others is also helping oneself."

Global trends are showing that the bulk of humanity seeks to move in the latter direction. With the exception of the few elites who benefit from U.S.-based unipolarity, unilateralism and hegemonism, the grand majority of humanity is evidently moving in the direction of multilateralism, multipolarity and win-win international relations. The shift that has occurred in the last two to three decades in global trade shows plainly the preference of China over the U.S. as a trading partner for most countries of the world. As the old Bob Dylan phrase goes, "you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows."

At the crossroads, it does seem like a pretty sure bet to assume that humanity will be taking the route premised on mutual development and prosperity.

In all honesty, such a development should not surprise us. We should have never expected the paradigm of the PNAC, which promotes prosperity for rich Western elites, but poverty and debt for the rest of humanity, to have lasted as long as they presumed it would. The Project for a New American Century turned out to be the Project for a New American Decade, a project sustained by imperial force, economic sanctions and media deception.

But today the tides are turning. China is spearheading a new path of common prosperity, win-win international relations and a shared future for the human community.

Humanity will inevitably benefit from it, yet it must first confront the final thrashings of the old logic as it fades. In this moment of transition, we must act with unity and resolve. **BR**

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A Sweet Bond: From Chilean Orchards to Chinese Tables

By Lan Xinzhen

The peak sales season for Chilean cherries in China commenced on December 5, highlighted by the arrival of the first Cherry Express vessel for this year's cherry season at Nansha Port, Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province in south China, laden with roughly 370 containers. The event was launched by Frutas de Chile ("Fruits from Chile"), the Latin American country's principal fruit export organization, with a documentary premiere in Guangzhou to kick off the 2025-26 season.

To many Chinese, Chilean cherries symbolize both Chile and the robust friendship between the two countries. As China's top supplier, providing over 90 percent of cherry imports, Chile's seasonal harvest from November to February arrives just as domestic production ends, coinciding with the Spring Festival, China's largest annual celebration and a time for family gatherings. This "direct supply from southern orchards to northern festival tables" is more than a mutually beneficial business; it is a people-to-people bond. The sweet journey from farm to dining table underscores the deep warmth of bilateral cooperation.

The two countries formally established diplomatic relations on December 15, 1970. Chile was not only the first South American country to establish diplomatic ties with China, but also achieved a number of "firsts:" It was the first Latin American country to sign a bilateral agreement with China on the latter's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, to recognize China as a full market economy and to sign with China a bilateral free trade agreement. Over the past 55 years, the relations between both nations have developed steadily and never fluctuated due to changes in the international geopolitical landscape.

Political mutual trust is the foundation of China-Chile friendship. The two countries have established an intergovernmental permanent committee. The China-Chile Joint Economic and Trade Commission has held 21 meetings so far, and the China-Chile Joint Committee on Intergovernmental Cooperation in Science and Technology has held 10. The two countries have also established a mechanism for strategic dialogue for economic cooperation and coordination, which has held four meetings to date.

All these demonstrate the close ties and frequent, smooth communication between the two governments. On May 14, President Xi Jinping met with Chilean President Gabriel Boric, who was in China to attend the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the China-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Forum in Beijing. Xi stressed that China is ready to work with Chile to consolidate political mutual trust, uphold mutual respect, treat each other as equals, pursue mutual benefit and win-win results, enhance exchanges on governance experience, firmly support each other on issues related to their respective core interests and major concerns, and safeguard their respective sovereignty, security and development interests. Boric said that Chile attaches great importance to its relations with China.

China-Chile economic and trade cooperation maintains strong momentum, with China serving as Chile's largest global trading partner, export destination and import source. This partnership grants Chile access to a vast market and technological support, deepening collaboration across sectors. Amid a new technological revolution, bilateral cooperation continues to strengthen in emerging fields such as the digital economy and green energy.

The two countries maintain a high degree of synchronization in the United Nations, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and other international organizations, and jointly safeguard multilateralism. They also conduct close exchanges in fields including astronomy, Antarctic scientific research, culture and education. On November 28, the Confucius Institute, a non-profit public educational organization that partners with local universities worldwide to promote Chinese language and culture, at Chile's University of Magallanes was inaugurated. It is currently the world's southernmost Confucius Institute by latitude and Chile's fourth.

Looking back on 55 years of wide-ranging exchange between the two countries, Chile has a forward-looking perspective among Latin American countries on cooperation with China, while China also considers Chile an important partner.

The significance of the friendly relations between the two countries is that it proves countries of different sizes, different systems and far apart can indeed establish a high level of mutual trust and maintain a focus on common development through mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. **BR**

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THROUGH THEIR EYES

People from around the world take you on a journey to rediscover China

Harvesting Hope

Young voices reimagine agricultural heritage for a global future By Zhao Wei

Inside the conference hall of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters in Rome, Italy, on October 15, a young man from Tianjin stepped onto the stage.

Speaking in clear, confident English, Liu Yuanrui, a master's student studying at Tianjin University, and one of three Chinese chosen to address the audience, delivered a message that resonated beyond national borders.

"No single model can solve all problems once and for all," he said in his address. "China's rural digitization exploration might inspire young entrepreneurs in Africa, while European social innovation practices can inject new vitality into our projects."

For Liu, the moment was the peak of a journey that began on the narrow paths of his hometown on the outskirts of Tianjin. Now, he stood at the heart of global food and agriculture governance, sharing lessons rooted in local soil with ministers, experts and young leaders from around the world.

Breathing heritage, shared future

The event at which Liu spoke, Youth Action on Green Agri-Heritage, was a standout side session of the 2025 World Food Forum (WFF) held in Rome on October 10-17. Co-hosted by the FAO's Youth and Women Unit, FAO country offices in Laos and Mongolia, the World Food Forum (China) and the China Internet Information Center, with support from Tsinghua University in Beijing and the UNDP SDG (United Nations Development Programme Sustainable Development Goals) Innovation Lab in Chengdu, it brought together more than 50 delegates, agricultural experts and officials from over a dozen countries and regions.

Their shared mission: to protect traditional agricultural systems—rice terraces, ancient tea forests and stone-walled irrigation networks, not as relics of the past, but as living systems that continue to nourish communities, safeguard biodiversity and preserve cultural identity. Chinese participants aptly referred to them as "breathing heritage": dynamic and enduring examples of human-nature symbiosis. However, this heritage is now under mounting threat from mechanization, urban sprawl, climate change and aging rural populations.

The 2025 WFF convened under the theme Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future—a fitting setting as it aligned with major anniversaries: the 80th for both the UN and the FAO, and the 50th for China-European Union diplomatic relations.

Within this wider context, the youth-led event distinguished itself by framing "farming civilization" as a unifying thread across cultures, fostering collaboration and shared learning among regions rich in agricultural legacy.

Gao Anming, Editor in Chief of China International Communications Group, emphasized this point in his address: "Agricultural cultural heritage is the crystallization of wisdom from the symbiosis between humans and nature, and it offers timeless insights into sustainable development." He also highlighted the success of the Youth Action on Green Agri-Heritage program launched earlier this year, where young participants from over 10 countries proposed 12 innovative projects and co-produced six micro-documentaries. These were screened during several events held on Jeju Island, the Republic of Korea, and Vientiane, capital of Laos, with more than 400 attendees participating in person. Meanwhile, the initiative's multilingual media coverage and related social media posts reached a global audience of over 200 million.

"In a world marked by accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss and growing threats to food security, agricultural heritage offers invaluable solutions," Liu told *Beijing Review*. "The UN SDGs (a 2030 global blueprint to reduce inequality and protect our planet)—ending poverty, achieving zero hunger and tackling climate change—can all draw inspiration from this traditional knowledge. In today's fast-paced technological era, we must preserve these traditions even as we innovate on their basis, using modern technology to validate, refine and share ancient wisdom."

From field paths to podium

For Liu, the journey to the FAO stage in Rome was a year in the making. Growing up on the rural outskirts of Tianjin, he developed a deep, personal respect for food and the land that sustained his family. Simple meals of cabbage and rice taught him early on that every grain had value, a lesson that would later fuel his commitment to rural development.

Beyond his academic studies, Liu stayed grounded, literally. He joined rural support teams, venturing deep into villages to speak with farmers, document cultural traditions, and assess how heritage was being preserved and passed on. As leader of the Supporting Farmers, Building Dreams in the Countryside initiative, he organized a national public interest competition that gathered students from more than 10 universities to design sustainable tourism plans for a township in Gansu Province in northwest China, transforming local heritage into a catalyst for economic renewal.

That commitment extended beyond China. As co-founder of the Concrete Dreams, Silk Road Pioneers international research team, Liu led fieldwork

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The Youth Action on Green Agri-Heritage underway at the 2025 World Food Forum in Rome, Italy, on October 15

across five countries, covering more than 28,000 km in 2024. The team visited Chinese-funded enterprises, infrastructure sites, universities and international institutions, producing five policy reports that were later incorporated into Tianjin's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) for the construction sector, a blueprint that outlines the municipality's goals for the next five years.

All of Liu's groundwork culminated in the core message he brought to Rome: Agricultural heritage is not a relic of the past, but a living, evolving system with the power to drive sustainable development. And he was far from alone in that belief.

From Laos, Ekasith Vanmany presented his country's efforts to build a national framework that involves youth in heritage preservation. From Mongolia, herder Namjildorj B. shared how traditional pastoral knowledge is being passed down while maintaining ecological balance in the grasslands.

Chinese delegates added further depth to the conversation. Gu Shijing from Zhejiang Province highlighted organic farming as a route to ecological resilience. Hou Yuying from Fujian Province shared how traditional Chinese agricultural wisdom is being integrated into modern food systems. From France, Noé Gabriel Alexandre Michon, collaborating with Tsinghua's rural revitalization platform, showcased how discarded plastics are transformed into cultural products, connecting circular economy innovation with heritage preservation.

For Liu and his peers, the answers to global challenges lie not only in policy or innovation, but in concrete action rooted in tradition and guided by a shared vision of a more sustainable future. "Young people are natural networkers, building transnational and cross-sector cooperation through diverse platforms and mechanisms to form a 'youth alliance' for tackling global issues," Liu explained. "The WFF is a vivid example of this, where young representatives from different countries and backgrounds come together to share experiences, exchange ideas and coordinate actions. This networked model of cooperation will become a defining feature of future global governance."

Eyes on the world

At the dialogue's opening ceremony, senior FAO officials immediately set a clear and urgent tone. Kazuki Kitaoka, Director of the FAO's Youth and Women Division, emphasized that agricultural heritage systems are more than historical artifacts; they represent an ongoing dialogue between humanity and nature, rich in ecological wisdom and holding vital clues for future food security.

FAO's Representative in Mongolia Diao Qingyun urged young people not just to benefit from change, but to become "co-creators" of more resilient and equitable agrifood systems.

For Liu, who has backpacked across 12 countries over the years, sometimes for research, sometimes to attend international forums, sometimes simply to feel the pulse of unfamiliar cultures, the Rome dialogue was not an endpoint, but another chapter. "Going out is not to prove something," he said, "but to come back better."

From his childhood in Tianjin's fields to long hours in the university library, and now to speaking on an FAO stage, Liu's journey mirrors that of many in China's rising generation: firmly rooted in local soil, yet increasingly fluent in global conversations on sustainability, equity and a shared future. Next summer, he plans to lead a team to East African countries, including Kenya, to conduct research on China's overseas projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, a China-proposed framework to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

As the dialogue in Rome concluded, one message stood out clearly from the young participants: Agricultural heritage is not a nostalgic luxury. It is a living piece of infrastructure for food security, climate resilience and cultural continuity. Safeguarding it requires more than preservation; it calls for bold innovation, and a generation ready to step forward. Like Liu, they stand at the crossroads of tradition and transformation, bringing grounded stories from the fields to the world. **BR**

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From Relics to Real life

Fresh ideas are making heritage protection sustainable By Yuan Yuan

A roofed arch bridge in Taishun County, Zhejiang Province, with a history of over 400 years, welcomed a special group of visitors on November 26—more than 30 teenagers from the United States participating in the 2025 Chinese Culture Experience Camp.

Known as *langqiao* in Chinese, roofed arch bridges are structures with roofed corridors. As early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907), residents in the mountainous Taishun area relied on these bridges to cross streams and valleys. More than just passages, they also functioned as marketplaces, resting spots and venues for religious ceremonies. The entire structure is built without a single nail or rivet, held together entirely by intricate mortise-and-tenon joinery.

Taishun is home to 32 ancient roofed arch bridges, which remain woven into the daily lives of local communities. Wu Junlong, an associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages of Wenzhou University of Technology and one of the camp's initiators and leaders, expressed his hope that such exchange activities would help visitors to China gain a more comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of its culture.

"Many in the group marveled at the roofed arch bridges here and the clean, rustic charm of the countryside left a deep impression on them," Wu said.

The living legacy

Lin Ruozheng, head of Xiaqiao Village in the county, fondly recalled his aunt selling tofu by the bridge and his grandfather's pharmacy was at the bridgehead. He said as these structures have gained recognition, villagers have voluntarily formed patrols to guard them during floods, protecting this shared heritage.

Rapid urbanization once threatened the craftsmanship of Chinese wooden arch bridges as few people were learning the necessary skills to build them. Natural disasters also posed continuous risks. In September 2016, a typhoon severely damaged three major bridges in Taishun. Local residents spontaneously waded into the waters to retrieve wooden components and organized fundraising, completing the main restoration within a month.

Local authorities have implemented multiple measures to revitalize this craft. These include pioneering the Wenzhou Taishun Roofed Arch Bridge Protection Regulation in 2021 to strengthen safeguards, organize training workshops, and launch the Roofed Arch Bridges Going Global campaign to enhance international visibility.

On December 5, 2014, the "traditional design and practices for building Chinese wooden arch bridges," represented by Taishun's roofed arch bridges, were reclassified by UNESCO from the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity—a reclassification showing improved protection.

For locals like Lin, roofed arch bridges are not just landmarks but also symbols of cultural exchange. Wenzhou-Kean University, based in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, is facilitating a sister-city relationship between Taishun and Lovech, Bulgaria, which also has a unique roofed arch bridge, hoping to link the two cultures through the bridges.

Extended journeys

Today, in China, cultural heritage is moving beyond museums and being

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A staff member (right) introduces the traditional construction techniques used to build roofed arch bridges at Taishun Culture Center in Taishun County, Zhejiang Province, on February 25

XINHUA

Tourists browse digital displays of embroidery at the Wuxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Park in Huaihua, Hunan Province, on September 16

woven seamlessly into the fabrics of modern life, becoming vibrant and relevant. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is integrated with tourism to create an economic ecosystem that sustains its own preservation.

Nowhere is this more vivid than in Danzhai Wanda Town, Guizhou Province, a place rightfully dubbed "China's ICH Town." There, people experience ICH rather than observe. Visitors roll up their sleeves to make paper using 1,300-year-old techniques at workshops, their hands dipping into the same vats as generations before them. They feel the fabric under wax in a batik class, dance to the rhythmic beat of the Miao Jinji Dance, and sleep in a guesthouse adorned with intricate birdcage art. The Jinji Dance is a traditional folk dance from the Miao ethnic group, in which female performers wearing colorful costumes that resemble golden pheasants dance in a circle while male dancers play the *lusheng*, a traditional pipe instrument.

This May, these immersive experiences drew over 170,000 visitors, generating a staggering 190 million yuan ($27 million) in revenue in just half a month.

The recent Third China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Annual Conference, held in Danzhai, further showcased this momentum by featuring ICH from across the country. Over 500 inheritors and experts gathered, turning a 1.5-km street into a living encyclopedia of Chinese culture. The air vibrated with the thunder of Ansha Waist Drums and smelled of Leshan sweet-skinned duck, and skilled hands demonstrated bamboo weaving.

Visitors no longer just see and do; they also take a piece of the unique experience home in a batik scarf, a silver bracelet or other accessories. These transactions do more than generate income. They extend the heritage's journey to other places and into everyday life.

Heritage plus fashion

In recent years, integrating ICH elements with fashion has become a growing trend. At the closing gala of the 2025 China International Fashion Week (Autumn/Winter Edition), a fashion collection centered on national-level intangible cultural heritage—the costume of Huian women—stole the show as the finale. Consequently, Huian County in Fujian Province was honored with the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Fashion Innovation Award, becoming the first county nationwide to receive this distinguished accolade.

Once practical workwear for protection against wind during labor, the Huian women's costume was reimagined on the runway. Traditional elements like the yellow conical bamboo hats and silver waistbands interplayed with modern tailoring and innovative fabrics under dynamic lighting.

Driving this transformation is the fresh energy of young inheritors like 35-year-old Zeng Ruting. Together with her mother, Liu Wuqiao, she safeguards the traditional craftsmanship while pioneering innovations in materials and styles. They have introduced lighter fabrics such as silk and brocade, redesigned the traditional headscarf into a more fashionable triangular kerchief, and even incorporated classic patterns into bachelor's gowns that have been exported overseas.

Simultaneously, the cultural essence of Huian women is undergoing a "metamorphosis" through creative cultural products. Local enterprises are transforming distinctive elements from the attire, such as the decorative metal pieces and traditional patterns, into accessories like bag charms and pendants that blend traditional symbolism with contemporary aesthetics. This allows the culture heritage to adorn daily life in a more accessible and graceful manner.

"Our ultimate goal is to elevate Huian women's costume into a cultural symbol," Zeng told *Fujian Daily*. "While preserving its heritage is crucial, innovation and development are even more important. Only in this way can traditional intangible cultural heritage remain vibrant and alive." **BR**

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Lexicon of Change

When buzzwords become windows into a country's transformation

By Ji Jing

Shanghai-based language and literature magazine *Yaowen Jiaozi*, literally "biting phrases and chewing characters," recently unveiled its Top 10 Chinese Buzzwords for 2025. Released on December 2, the list spotlights linguistic trends that reflect societal changes.

Huang Anjing, the magazine's editor-in-chief, told *Jiefang Daily* newspaper that this year's word selections mirror the arrival of the "intelligent era," marked by a faster-than-ever evolution of the Chinese lexicon.

Many of the chosen terms are tied to AI, highlighting how deeply technology is reshaping language. For example, the inclusion of "Embodied Intelligence" shows AI is not only transforming the world but also actively influencing how people communicate.

In terms of social change, as industrial structures evolve and the economy transforms, new employment models have emerged—earning "Digital Nomad" (a person who works remotely using modern information technology) a spot among the trending terms.

Top 10 buzzwords for 2025

***Renxing* ("Resilience")**

Originally a physics term describing an object's ability to deform without breaking under external stress, "resilience" has evolved to signify a tenacious spirit. As a 2025 buzzword, it is now defined as "the capacity to effectively counter external interference, resist shocks and achieve sustained development." In recent years, amidst rising global unilateralism and protectionism, escalating technological blockades and global supply chain volatility, China has steadfastly managed domestic affairs. By continuously promoting high-level opening up, advancing economic transformation and achieving solid progress in high-quality development, the national economy has maintained a trajectory of steady improvement. Consequently, the term "resilience" has become ubiquitous, with phrases such as "developmental resilience" and "economic resilience" frequently appearing in official documents and media reports.

***Jushen Zhineng* ("Embodied Intelligence")**

"Embodied Intelligence" refers to an intelligent entity possessing a physical carrier, contrasting sharply with disembodied intelligence like large language models such as Chinese DeepSeek. Embodied intelligence, such as humanoid robots, learns and evolves autonomously through dynamic interaction with the physical environment. Its emergence signals a new phase in AI development. As technological pathways mature and application scenarios broaden, embodied intelligence is poised to drive significant leaps in productivity across sectors, including industrial manufacturing, transportation, logistics and commercial services.

***Suchao* ("Jiangsu City Football League")**

"*Suchao*" is the abbreviation for the Jiangsu City Football League. Since its opening match in east China's Jiangsu Province on May 10, the league has rapidly ascended to become one of the most popular mass sports events of 2025 across China. The *Suchao* phenomenon is attributed to a convergence of factors, including policy backing, economic investment, widespread grassroots participation, high quality of play, robust social media engagement and its success in boosting urban cultural and tourism consumption. The *Suchao* model has since captivated other Chinese provinces and cities, leading many to host or plan similar local soccer tournaments.

***Saibo Duizhang* ("Cyber Reconciliation")**

"*Saibo*" is a transliteration of the English "cyber," indicating concepts related to the Internet. Originating in science fiction and computer science literature, the term has permeated popular culture to denote hi-tech, digital and networked phenomena. "Reconciliation" is used metaphorically here: It describes two parties holding their respective "life ledgers" (personal experiences and observations) to cross-check each other's "data," thereby resolving biases and misunderstandings stemming from information asymmetry.

"Cyber reconciliation" specifically describes a cross-cultural exchange between Chinese and U.S. netizens. In early 2025, following the U.S. announcement regarding an imminent TikTok ban at the time, many American users flooded Chinese platforms like Xiaohongshu (RedNote). They shared intimate details of their lives and cultural values, directly engaging with Chinese users and effectively dismantling existing stereotypes about China. This genuine interaction, in turn, provided Chinese netizens with more authentic insights into American society. "Cyber reconciliation" offers an important model for information exchange and cultural dialogue between nations.

***Shuzi Youmin* ("Digital Nomad")**

This term describes a demographic, predominantly younger individuals, who don't have a fixed office location. They leverage modern information technology to work remotely, possessing strong autonomy and self-management capabilities. These professionals often engage in creative fields such as software development, content creation and design, moving fluidly across regions and transcending the geographic constraints of traditional employment. Frequently, they strategically relocate to lower-cost areas to optimize their financial stability while achieving a sustainable work-life

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Fans celebrate after the Taizhou soccer team wins the final of the Jiangsu City Football League in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, on November 1

balance. This evolving lifestyle and modality of work are increasingly appealing to young people globally, prompting many countries to introduce specific visa policies and tax incentives tailored for digital nomads.

***Guzi* ("Goods")**

The term "*Guzi*" (a homophonic slang for the English word "goods") refers to tangible merchandise infused with elements of ACG (Animation, Comic and Game) culture, such as collectible badges, acrylic figure stands and themed cards. Initially confined to the *erciyuan* ("two-dimensional space") subcultures, Guzi has recently crossed into the mainstream, attracting a growing number of young consumers. The surge in demand has galvanized an entire industrial ecosystem, the Guzi Economy, spanning design, manufacturing, sales, logistics, exhibitions and collection. Major commercial hubs, including Shanghai, now feature numerous dedicated Guzi venues, drawing young enthusiasts nationwide for shopping and cultural engagement.

***Yuzhi* ("Pre-fabricated")**

The term "pre-fabricated" (meaning "made in advance") achieved massive popularity in 2025 following a critique from influencer Luo Yonghao on China's microblogging platform Weibo in September. He accused the well-known restaurant chain Xibei of "using premade dishes while charging premium prices." This controversy thrust the issue of pre-cooked food, including concerns over food safety and nutrient degradation, into the national spotlight. The term "pre-fabricated" then transcended the culinary sector to become a potent cultural metaphor. It is now applied to people and things perceived as being standardized and de-individualized in their creation. Examples include "pre-fabricated people," individuals seen as mass-produced by modern education and professional systems, and "pre-fabricated content," which describes cultural products (short videos, online literature and variety shows) manufactured using standardized formulas to maximize traffic and viewership.

***Huorengan* ("Sense of Being Alive")**

Huorengan, or "sense of being alive," signifies the authentic qualities an individual projects through social media or daily interactions. In the current intelligent era, social feeds are saturated with meticulously edited visuals and formulaic captions, creating an illusion of a "packaged" or "perfect" existence. As AI-generated speech and actions become increasingly sophisticated, the innate, imperfect authenticity of human beings acquires heightened value. The popularity of *Huorengan* demonstrates a deep desire for simple human warmth and lively, unscripted everyday experiences amid rapid technological advancement.

Xx *Jichu*, xx *Bujichu* ("If xx Is Basic, xx Will Not Be Basic")

This versatile phrase originated from a fashion vlogger's video titled "Formula for Making Basic Items Look Expensive," which suggested pairing principles such as: "If the top is basic, the bottom should not be basic." Netizens rapidly adapted this concept into a humorous structural template for discussing all facets of daily life. For instance: "If salary is basic, consumption will not be basic" wryly observes that low monthly earnings do not diminish one's enthusiasm for spending. The structure uses the sharp contrast between "basic" and "not basic" to generate a humorous effect, making it a flexible tool for both playful praise and humorous self-deprecation.

***Congcong Rongrong, Youren Youyu; Congcong Mangmang, Liangun Daipa* ("Calmly, Skillfully; Hurriedly, Scrambling")**

This evocative phrase gained explosive traction after a public representative from Taiwan Province used highly dramatic body language and emphatic intonation to critique the perceived chaotic municipal management in Taipei City. The account centered on the contrast: "It should have been calm and skillful, but now it's hurried and scrambling." When this video was uploaded, a mainland musician adapted the exact phrasing into a viral song titled "Good for Nothing." The highly addictive melody, combined with the singer's dramatic emotional delivery, rapidly spread online, sparking widespread imitation and "secondary creation" among netizens on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. Consequently, "calmly and skillfully" versus "hurriedly and scrambling" became a popular shorthand to satirize the stark disparity between ideal states and challenging real-life predicaments. **BR**

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Steam Rooms to Dream Rooms

How China's bathhouses have reinvented themselves for a new generation

By Zhang Yage

When the temperature drops below zero in north China, a familiar winter ritual begins: a bubbling hotpot, an electric blanket on the bed, a steaming kettle on the table—and an entire afternoon spent in a warm, inviting bathhouse. It is the northern way to embrace the season with warmth and ease, and just how Li Xinru, a 25-year-old Beijing resident, spent her last weekend, when the piercing cold wind finally put a pause on the "one mountain each weekend" plan she'd pursued since September.

"Going to a bathhouse is one of my favorite ways to spend a winter weekend, and I've grown increasingly fond of it, seeing the big changes taking place in the industry over the years," Li told *Beijing Review*. "You might assume that my experience is quite fancy, but it's not—or at least the price is not."

The concept was simple: For 359 yuan ($51), or half the price of a mid-range hotel room within the city, Li purchased an overnight pass on group-buy platform Meituan to a bathhouse in Shijingshan District, on the city's outskirts.

After a relaxing mineral bath, Li spent her evening gaming in a dedicated e-sports zone, singing in a private KTV room with friends, and settling into a cushioned nook in a 24-hour cinema lounge. When fatigue finally set in, she retreated to a quiet, pod-style sleeping area.

"The bathhouse these days is so much more than a cheap place to shower and sleep," Li said. "It is a social club with a water feature, blending bars, cafeterias, mini libraries, game zones, sleeping areas and lots of other options, including getting a massage."

Li's night is emblematic of a quiet revolution in one of China's most traditional service industries. Across the country, bathhouses, massage parlors and hot spring resorts are undergoing a dramatic reinvention. They are strategically pivoting from purely functional spaces, dedicated to cleansing or therapeutic touch, toward becoming multifaceted "third spaces" for China's youth. This new generation is flocking to these venues not for a quick scrub, but for all-in-one experiences that seamlessly blend affordable wellness, immersive entertainment, social connection and even short-stay accommodation. In the process, a sector once fading into nostalgia is writing a new chapter, powered by the desires of Gen Z.

Young minds, young needs

For decades, the quintessential image of a Chinese bathhouse was often austere and utilitarian: a tiled hall echoing with slapping water, a faint scent of disinfectant, rows of lockers... It was a place primarily associated with hygiene and physical relief, where patrons would scrub, steam and then leave—a functional, no-frills establishment that formed an enduring, if somewhat stark, part of urban memory. For the older generation, it was an occasional routine; for many young urbanites, it was an outdated relic from their parents' world, largely overlooked in favor of trendier leisure options.

This "bathhouse-plus" model is now the industry's driving formula. For new and young customers, modern complexes are less about tiles and taps, and more about curated experiences. It's common to find zones dedicated to virtual reality gaming, mahjong, manga libraries, nail salons and gourmet buffet restaurants offering everything from seafood to artisanal desserts. The goal is to maximize dwelling time, turning a 90-minute wash into a 12-hour mini-vacation.

The transformation is backed by strong consumption numbers. According to a market analysis and forecast report by third-party agency China Research and Intelligence Co. Ltd., the industry's market size is expected to surpass 70 billion yuan ($9.9 billion) soon and cross the 200 billion yuan ($28.3 billion) threshold by 2030, with an annual growth rate projected to remain between 10 percent and 12 percent.

And the driving forces behind all these changes, according to the report, are the

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Customers relax at a lounge in a hot spring resort in Jinzhou City, Liaoning Province, on January 14, 2024

SCREENSHOT

Tourists enjoy a hot spring bath amidst the ice and snow at the Qinghe Peninsula Hot Spring Resort Hotel in Shenyang, capital of Liaoning Province, on January 17

young minds. The demographic profile of consumers for the bathhouse industry is evolving. Gen Z, or those born between 1995 and 2009, are increasingly becoming the core clientele. Their share of the market is expected to rise from 22 percent in 2020 to 28 percent by late 2025.

Data from Meituan show that this year, searches for social hashtags such as "girls' gathering" and "corporate team building" at bathhouses grew by 230 percent year on year, highlighting the rising social appeal of these venues.

Meituan also indicates that university students stand out as a major target for the off-peak season—a large, established segment that is also growing rapidly. Transaction data highlight this momentum: The teenage group has seen a year-on-year increase of 242.86 percent, while the university student clientele has grown by 162.26 percent, both reflecting strong upward trends.

"I think the reason why they are making the place more functional is so that customers will spend more money there," Li explained. "My 359-yuan coupon covered my bath, showers, two complimentary massages, an overnight stay and two meals there, but I did pay more money for the karaoke and movie zones, the buffet, and one more traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) massage."

"The logic behind the business is still the same—to satisfy customer's needs for relaxation, but now customers have higher expectations for relaxation," Cheng Yi, client manager of Shenghe Water Bath in Hebei Province, told *Beijing Review*. "People consider bathhouses as a getaway vacation from their work pressures where they can not only enjoy traditional bathhouse services, such as a massage, a shower and a steam, but a place for entertainment and socializing."

From baths to hubs

While the bathhouse industry is embracing change, hot springs are also leveraging their inherent health and wellness advantages through integration with traditional Chinese medicine. This fusion is driving innovation within the hot spring sector, as seen in initiatives like the Fuzhou Changle Seawater Hot Spring Festival.

Held in Fuzhou's Changle District, Fujian Province, the festival exemplifies this trend by centering on the theme "Seawater Hot Spring plus TCM Wellness." It transforms hot spring venues into comprehensive health management destinations. At the Longjing Hot Spring Villa, a rare seawater hot spring rich in minerals, which are traditional TCM elements are deeply integrated. Professional TCM practitioners offer on-site consultations, including pulse diagnosis and constitution analysis, providing personalized wellness advice. The hot spring pools have been upgraded with themed infusions like mugwort for dispelling dampness, rose and milk for beautification purposes, and Chinese angelica for nourishment, altogether creating a holistic visitor experience.

This strategic shift allows the hot spring industry to tap into the growing healing economy, attracting a broader clientele seeking both relaxation and authentic health benefits, thereby writing its own chapter of reinvention alongside the transforming bathhouse sector.

"The changes within service industry are always impacted by consumption in many other areas. Take sports as an example: People show a growing interest in camping and exercising on the weekend. This may seem like it has nothing to do with the bathhouse industry, but now some of our competitors are actually reshaping part of their spaces into indoor sports areas," Cheng explained.

"TCM plus hot spring is the growing trend in hot spring industry," Cheng elaborated. "A focus on wellness will attract customers from different ages, given both seniors and younger people are now showing a zest for physical and mental wellbeing." **BR**

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CHINA MOSAIC

Weekly video commentary direct from Beijing

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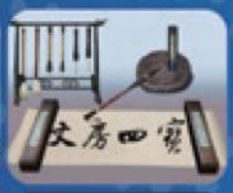

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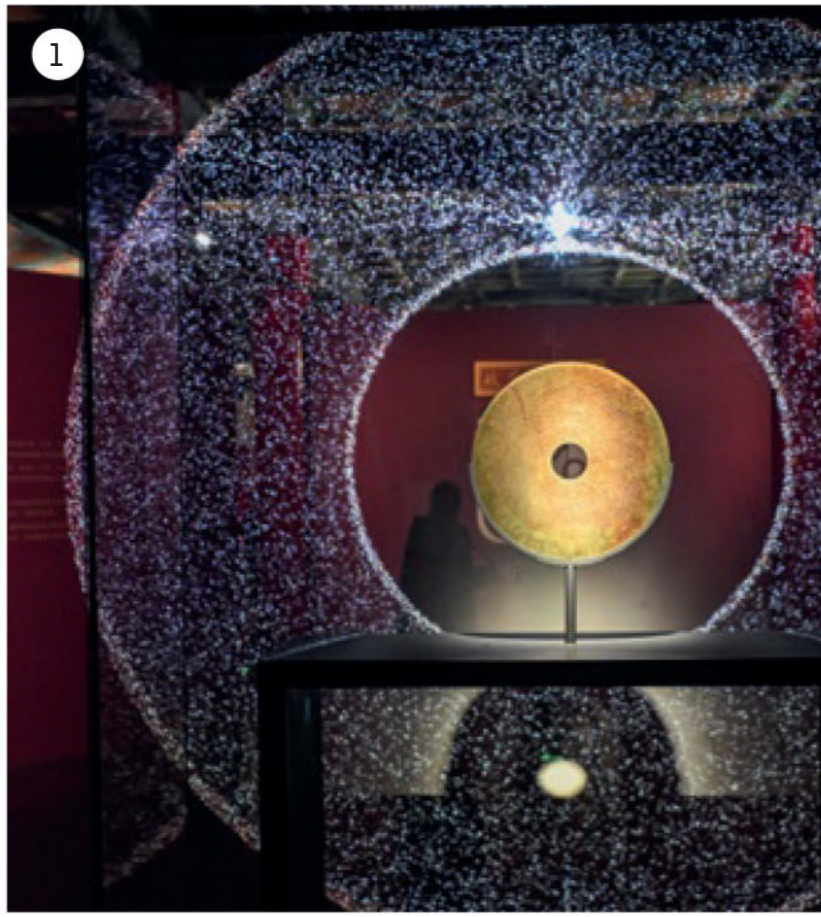
Centennial Exhibition



The Palace Museum in Beijing is celebrating its centenary with an exhibition titled A Century of Stewardship: From the Forbidden City to the Palace Museum. Running from September 30 to December 30, the exhibition features 200 sets of cultural relics highlighting the essence of Chinese civilization—continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness and peacefulness—while tracing the Palace Museum's journey to becoming the world's largest preserved royal palace complex and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. **BR**

(Text and photos by Wei Yao)

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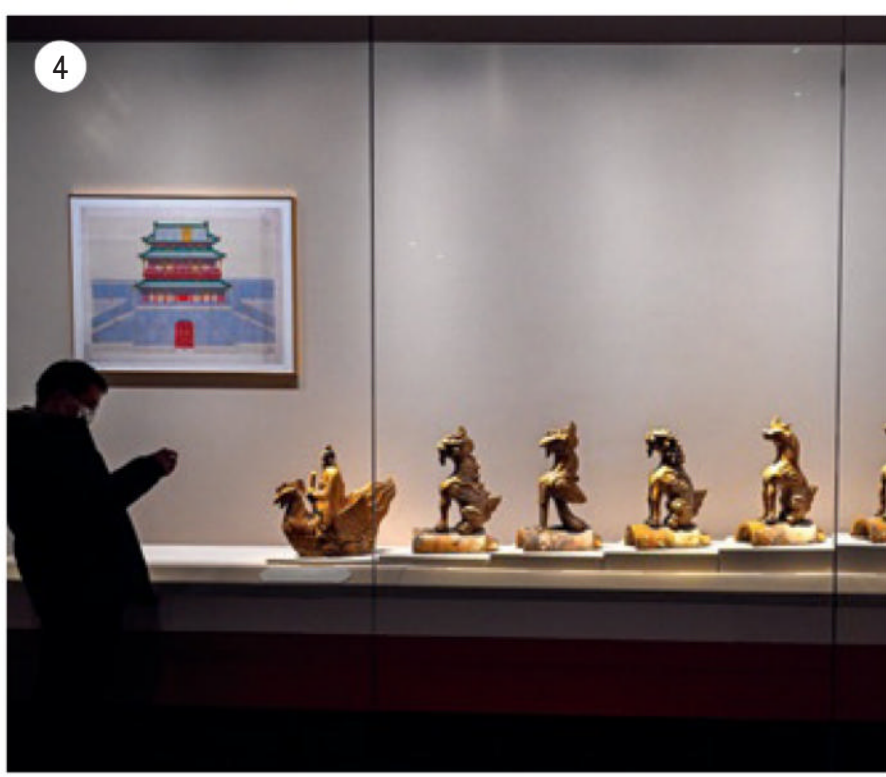
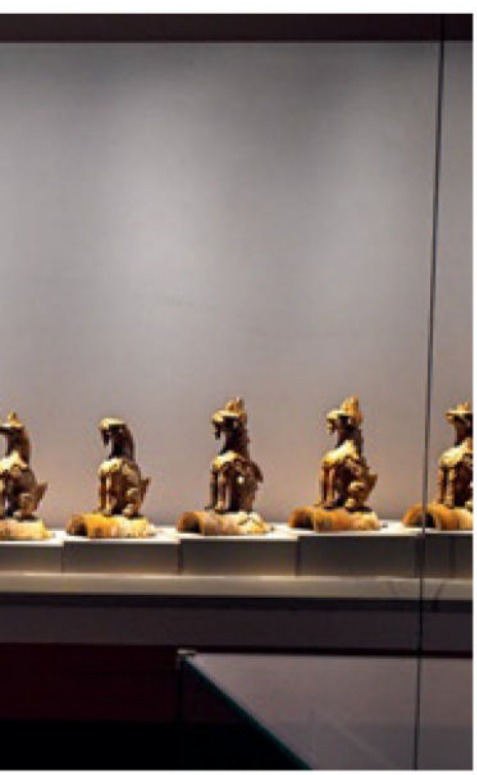




1. A jade disc dating back to the late Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) and the early Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 25)

2. A digital display brings cultural relics to life

3. Imperial seals from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)

4. Roof beasts, glazed figures that decorate the roofs of buildings within the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian), dating back to Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty

5. A gold cup studded with pearls and gems dating back to Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty

Sealed Records, Open Debates: China's New Approach to Minor Offenses

Article 136 of the newly revised Law of the People's Republic of China on Penalties for Administration of Public Security—set to take effect on January 1, 2026—introduces a system for sealing the records of certain public security violations.

Legal experts point out that the revised law aims to ease restrictions on those who have committed minor infractions, providing them a meaningful opportunity to reintegrate into society—a step they view as reflective of progress in the rule of law.

This provision has recently sparked widespread discussion across Chinese society, particularly because it will also apply to records of drug abuse.

On one side, individuals with a history of drug use hope this change will allow them to move beyond a lasting stigma. On the other side, some members of the public are concerned that sealing such records might be seen as tolerating illegal behavior. They question whether drug-related offenses should be categorized as "minor," and whether this shift could enable offenders to essentially erase their past.

Jin Zegang (Chengdu.cn): Some people worry that the new measure is condoning drug abuse and protecting drug abusers. To a large extent, this worry stems from the public's misunderstanding of "sealing." In the legal context, "sealing" does not imply that the illegal act has never occurred. Its core idea is that, given the offender has already borne the statutory accountability for their wrongdoing, the legal system will put their record of offenses in a confidential state, so as to prevent a single minor transgression—already punished—from resulting in continued discriminatory or exclusionary treatment of the individual in subsequent social activities such as job hunting and academic advancement.

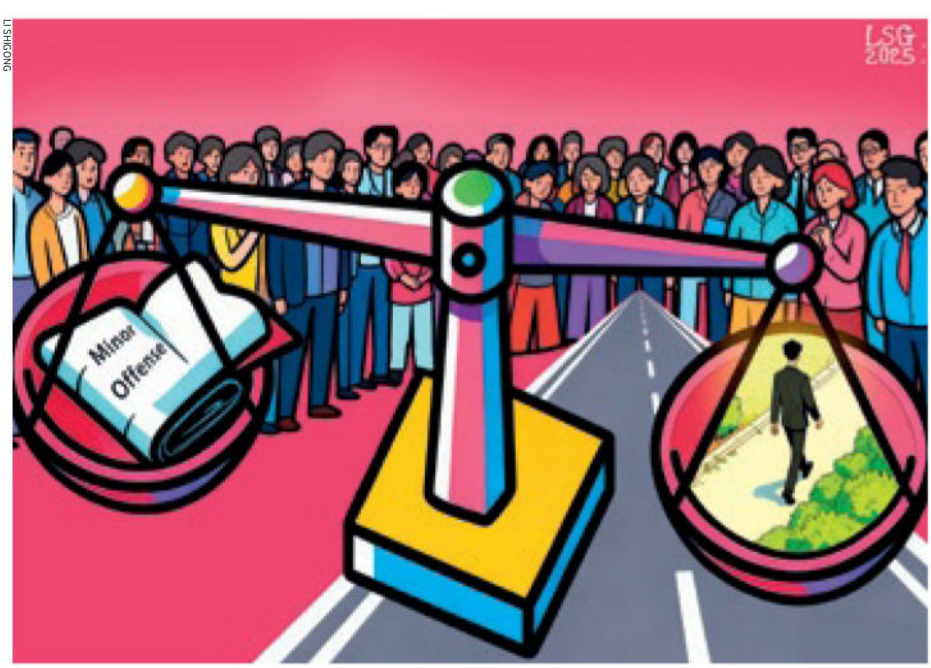
The exercise of authority must be commensurate with the aims to be achieved, and the severity of the measures must not exceed what is necessary to attain those aims. If the records are permanently made public and, as a result, the parties involved continue to face "vetoes" in various social contexts after the violation, this essentially constitutes an invisible, indefinite additional punishment.

For drug abuse, the law already imposes appropriate administrative penalties and requires drug abusers to undergo necessary detoxification and rehabilitation. Sealing the record is an action taken after this legal punishment has been completed; its core purpose is not to deny the harms of drug use but to break the vicious cycle of "drug use—punishment—social ostracism—relapse." For a drug user who has truly repented and fulfilled all legal obligations, to seal their records is a key institutional support that allows them to fully shed the stigma and rebuild their life.

Qin Xin'an (Yicai.com): Since the "system for sealing records of public security offenses" has already become a law, it must have undergone a rigorous legislative process—including soliciting public opinion—and represents the will of the vast majority of the public rather than the views of a few or a single individual.

The newly revised law does pose a big challenge to traditional values, given drug abuse is widely condemned in China. It's thus understandable that many people feel worried and can't accept the fact that drug abuse records will be sealed. However, with social progress, to establish a system for sealing minor offense records is not only to fulfill the principle of equivalent penalties (related to the principle of proportionality), but also to become a wide consensus.

Meanwhile, good social governance is inseparable from the public's participation. However, public debates are designed to reach consensus through dialogue, and opinions must be based on reasonable and logical arguments and evidence. So although there are loud voices against the new measure, these voices do not necessarily mean the opposition is right. **BR**



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